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# VINCENTIANA

50<sup>th</sup> YEAR - N. 1/2

JANUARY-APRIL 2006



## The Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* and the Vincentian Charisma

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CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
GENERAL CURIA

# VINCENTIANA

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of the Congregation of the Mission  
published every two months

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# HOLY SEE

## CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Prot. N. 1568/05/L

### THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

At the request of the Reverend Father Gregory Gay, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, in a letter dated 7 October 2005, by virtue of faculties granted to this Congregation by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, we very willingly grant that in the proper calendar of the afore-mentioned Congregation Blessed Jean-Charles Caron and Nicolas Colin, priests and martyrs, may be celebrated at the grade of memorial on 2 September, along with Blessed Louis-Joseph François and companions, martyrs.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

From the offices of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 15 October 2005.

✠ Francis Cardinal Arinze

*Prefect*

(✠ Domenico Sorrentino)

*Archbishop Secretary*

**New Archbishop of Tripoli.** On 28 December 2005, the **Holy Father** approved the election, carried out canonically by the *Synod of Bishops of the Church of Antioch of the Maronites* (Bkerké, Lebanon from 18-24 September 2005), of various prelates. Among the elected was **Fr. Georges Bou Jaoudé, C.M.**, as *Archbishop of Tripoli of the Maronites* (Catholics 101,350, priests 171, religious 226) in Lebanon. The Archbishop was born on 27 December 1943 in Jouret El-Ballout (Lebanon). He pronounced his vows in the Congregation on 11 November 1961 and was ordained a priest on 9 February 1968. Most recently, he was superior of the community of Mejdlaya. Congratulations!

**New Vincentian Cardinal.** On 22 February, Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, the **Holy Father, Benedict XVI**, made known the names of 15 new cardinals who will be created in the Consistory on 24 March. Among the new voting cardinals is **Archbishop Franc Rodé, C.M.**, *Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*. Msgr. Rodé is 71 years old. He was born on 23 September 1934 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In 1945 his family took refuge in Austria and in 1948 moved to Argentina. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on 2 February 1952. He studied at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and the Catholic Institute of Paris, where he obtained a doctorate in theology. He made his vows on 7 March 1957. He was ordained a priest on 29 June 1960. In 1965, at the request of his superiors, he returned to Yugoslavia where he served as a parochial vicar, director of studies of the Congregation and professor in the theology faculty in Ljubljana (1966-1968), and Visitor (1973-1979). He was a consultant for the Secretariat for Non-Believers in 1978. En 1981 he was transferred to that Dicastery and named Vice-secretary in 1982. In 1993, the Pope united the *Pontifical Council for Culture* and the *Pontifical Council for Non-Believers*, putting him in charge of the new Pontifical Council for Culture (1993-1997). On 5 March 1997 he was named *Archbishop of Ljubljana* and consecrated as such on 6 April 1997 in the Cathedral of Ljubljana. On 11 February 2004 he was named *Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*. ??? He will be created a Cardinal in the Consistory of 24 March 2006 ???. The new cardinals come from various parts of the world and fulfill diverse functions at the service of the People of God. The Holy Father invites us to pray for them so that the Lord might grant them the graces necessary to carry out their mission with generosity. On 23 March a prayer and reflection meeting will be held with all the members of the College of Cardinals. The day following the Consistory, 25 March, Solemnity of the Annunciation of Our Lord, the Holy Father will preside a solemn celebration with the new cardinals. Msgr. Rodé is the *first Vincentian Cardinal of the Latin Rite*.

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)

# GENERAL CURIA

Rome, 24 January 2006  
*Feast of St. Francis de Sales*

*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission  
To the Local Superiors*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill our hearts now and forever.

I want to briefly present to you a topic that is very important for the community: absences and departures from the Congregation of the Mission.

## **1. Some data about departures from the Congregation**

In the last six years (1999-2004) 122 confreres have ceased being members of the Congregation of the Mission. Every year, on the average, some 20 missionaries leave. Some are Brothers or students (13.1%); but the great majority are priests.

The departures have been granted either by dispensation or dismissal.

Type of Departure	Nº	%
Dispensation from vows for Brothers or students	16	13.11
Dispensation from vows for reasons of incardination into a Diocese or congregation	30	24.60
Dispensation from the obligations of the priestly state (AOO)	26	21.31
Automatic expulsion (usually for civil marriage)	37	30.32
Expulsion from the CM after going through a process	13	10.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>99.99</b>

There are many motives for these departures. Without going into an analysis, we can acknowledge the influence of personal, affective, formational, community, apostolic, institutional and socio-cultural factors, etc.

## 2. Some data about absences from the Congregation

At the end of 2004 there were 185 men absent from the Congregation (cf. "General Curia, Annual Statistics, 2004", *Vincentina*, 2005, p. 25). Of this number 171 were priests, 10 deacons, 3 Brothers and 1 student. At the end of 1997, the number of absences was 105. In seven years the number of absences has increased by 80 confreres.

Of these 185 absences, 67 (36%) are legitimate absences, i.e. they have permission from the Visitor or the Superior General for the absence. On the other hand, 115 (64%) are absent illegitimately: their permission has terminated and has not been renewed.

By regions the distribution is as follows:

Region	N°	%
Latin America	104	56.20
Europe	44	23.80
USA	14	7.60
Africa	12	6.50
Asia - Australia	11	5.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100.00</b>

There are provinces especially affected by these absences. Two provinces have more than 20 absences each, and three others have more than 10 each. These five provinces account for 75 absences.

## 3. Orientation given in 1996

Since many new Visitors have taken office since 1996, let me remind them of a few paragraphs from a letter which Fr. Robert Maloney, the former Superior General, wrote to the Visitors on 15 April 1996:

*Such irregular situations, which frequently lead to departure from the Congregation, can often be traced to personal factors*

such as emotional immaturity, difficulty in living with others in community, lack of commitment to prayer, sexual involvement with others, and problems in dealing with authority. The "problematic" confrere himself, as is evident, bears much responsibility for dealing with these factors in his life. At the same time, it is also important for us to recognize that at times factors within the Congregation may have contributed to the development of problems; e.g., first assignments where a confrere lived in isolation, conflictive situations within local houses, reluctance to renew apostolic or community plans within a province.

Today, along with the members of the General Council, I ask all the Visitors while remaining attentive to the norms of the Church and those of the Congregation of the Mission, to try to help missionaries who are in irregular situations to find a prompt solution by offering them possible alternatives. In that light, I remind you of the following:

1. It is the role of the Visitors not only to observe the principle of Christian charity with relation to these confreres (C. 72, § 1), but also to apply justly the norms of the Church and of the Congregation of the Mission.
2. When examining a particular confrere's situation, in which you find some difficulty out of the ordinary, be certain that we in the General Curia are happy to receive any observations you might have and to help in any way we can, while leaving to the province the immediate responsibility for handling the matter.
3. If after a reasonable period of time a confrere in an irregular situation (e.g., illegal absence, concubinage) does not respond positively to the call addressed to him, the Visitor with his Council should start the process of expulsion, following carefully the norms of the Church and of the Congregation of the Mission (C. 72, § 2; 74, § 2). To help you in this matter I am sending you a brief report on the steps to follow in case it is necessary to resort to the said proceedings. At times, confreres in problematic situations will be willing to cooperate "amicably" in a canonical process (e.g., by remaining silent); at times, others will make canonical appeals against the process.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Afterwards in 1998 the *Practical Guide for the Visitor* was published, and in 2005 the second edition appeared. The contents of the guide alluded to here can be found in the *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, nos. 169-181.

4. *If a confrere has contracted marriage or attempted it, the Visitor with his council should promptly make the declaration of fact described in C 73, § 2. Cf. attached example.<sup>2</sup> Please note that some documentary evidence is required; "common knowledge" is insufficient.*
5. *If a confrere is living and working "ad experimentum" in a diocese, he is automatically incardinated after five years, unless the bishop decides otherwise (cf. Canon 693). This fact should be formalized in writing, by correspondence between the Visitor and bishop, and by obtaining a written dispensation from vows from the Superior General.*
6. *Permissions to live outside the Community granted by the Visitor according to Art. 67 of the Constitutions can be given for only one year, not renewable, except in the three cases mentioned in the article. It is evident that many such permissions expired long ago. In these instances, the confrere is in an irregular situation and should be contacted by the Visitor, so that an appropriate remedy can be found.*
7. *In any case, given the irregular circumstances of some confreres, we should try to avoid their remaining in such situations indefinitely. Unresolved cases sometimes cause great harm to the Congregation; some provinces have already suffered serious damages to the morale of the province as well as its finances because of the actions of confreres living in irregular situations (e.g., suits involving sexual problems or automobile accidents; the payment of large medical expenses in old age).*

#### 4. Observations and Recommendations

Why do these absences and departures happen in our province and in our Congregation? These situations should be occasions to ask ourselves, on the personal and community levels, about, among other things, our way of living out the charism, our fidelity, our community

We should be very clear and attentive in this matter: "official" absences and departures are not the only ones that can happen. In our own communities — do we not sometimes feel that there are confreres who physically present, but spiritually, communally and apostolically absent? What does this situation ask of us on the personal and community level? We, our local and provincial communities, can and should do something in the face of this reality.

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<sup>2</sup> *Practical Guide for the Visitor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Appendix n. 5.

The absences and departures, frequently enough, are the final step of an ongoing process to which the community should pay attention.

The charity of Christ who had compassion on the crowds (C. 11) should be our guide for acting. We should seek the good of our confrere (absent or in the process of leaving the Congregation); but we should also seek the good of the local and provincial communities, the good of the confreres who are trying faithfully to live out the Vincentian charism within the community.

I recommend to the Visitors that they be very careful and even demanding in granting permission for legitimate absences (cf. C 67). Could we be granting them too easily? On the other hand, we should be making an effort to redirect the illegitimate absences, which represent almost two-thirds of the total. These latter cases are especially delicate and, if we are not attentive to them, they can cause serious harm to the province and the Congregation.

In recent years and for different motives, the cases of confreres accused of sexual abuse of minors have increased, especially in some provinces. The Visitors must take special care with these situations. *A Practical Guide for the Visitor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, has incorporated some useful and practical advice for dealing with this matter (cf. *PGV*, nos. 193-195 and Appendix 9).

I ask the Visitors, together with their councils, to take the most appropriate steps in these cases of absences and departures. In this regard, I recommend that they and their councils dedicate time to the study of the following texts and keep them in mind when they must take action:

- Constitutions, no. 67 and nos. 68-76
- Statutes, no. 14; no. 25 according to the version of the 1992 General Assembly; and no. 35
- *PGV*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, nos. 123-203
- *PGV*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Appendices 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9

I would also like to say something to the superiors and local communities. Make the topic of the absences and departures from the Congregation a topic for your own personal reflection and for dialogue within the community. Moreover the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior* speaks of the relationship of the local superior with those confreres who do not live in the house (*PGLS*, 40) and with the individual members of the house. It is the specific mission of the local superior to be in continuous dialogue, both through informal conversation and structured dialogue, with each man in the house. I urge all the confreres and especially superiors to take up with enthusiasm this practice of structured dialogue or "communication," following the *PGLS*, 70-73. This is not an outdated practice and it

should not be marginalized in our communities. On the contrary, I feel sure that each confrere and each local community will obtain abundant fruit from it if it is done with a respectful and evangelical spirit.

## **5. A special meeting**

The Superior General and his council, under the leadership of the Procurator to the Holy See, Fr. Varghese Thottamkara, are planning a special formation meeting to train confreres from different provinces in the work of helping the Visitors, in their own provinces and in others, to work on cases of absences and departures. This meeting will take place in Rome from 10-16 January 2007. More information will be forthcoming.

I ask the Visitors to send a copy of this letter to each local community.

Please pray personally and as a community for those confreres who are experiencing difficulties, for those absent from community life, and for those who, in recent years, have left the Congregation. I commend myself to your prayers and I assure you of mine.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

*Superior General*



Rome, 25 January 2006

*Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul  
and the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission*

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

I write to you today with great joy as we celebrate once again the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission. I pray that God might give us the grace to continue to be a vibrant, prophetic presence in the world where we are called to serve and evangelize especially the most abandoned. To do so, I encourage you to continue to reflect in a prayerful way on our Constitutions and Statutes that clearly spell out who we are called to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Fr. McCullen pointed out in his letter of introduction to the Constitutions, "Within the covers of this book our identity as a Congregation in the Church is delineated. We must not be content to leave that delineation on paper alone. The text must now be imprinted on our hearts and lived out in our vocation to preach the gospel to the poor."

I certainly have confidence in the grace of God and the goodness of each and every one of the confreres of the Congregation that we will, on this occasion of the celebration of the Foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, renew our faithfulness to Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we encounter in the poor we are called to evangelize and serve.

At this time also, I would like to announce the recipients of the Systemic Change Award for 2006. They are from the Provinces of Madagascar, North India, Slovenia, Peru and Eastern USA. Below, I will give a brief description of these projects and how they hope to bring about systemic change in the lives of the oppressed poor. Each project recipient will receive US \$20,000. Because of the size and nature of the projects submitted, the General Council has decided that all the award money will be given to the recipients in 2006, instead of awarding the money over a two-year period as was described in the application form received by all the Visitors.

### Province of Madagascar

Promotion and social integration of the rejected persons in the villages of Nohona and Tanantsara, near Vohipeno in Madagascar, presented by Emeric Amyot d'Inville.

There is in the region of Vohipeno, Diocese of Farafangana, in Madagascar, a clan of rejected persons, societal outcasts for several centuries. Their most important villages are Nohona and Tanantsara. They are considered as dogs by the other clans of the Antaimoro tribe, as well as by other tribes. They are deeply scorned and ostracized by society. They are victims of two fundamental taboos, still very alive today, which marginalize them and foster the rejection: 1) they are not permitted to marry persons outside their clan, hence the inbreeding, and 2) no one is allowed to eat meat from an animal which they have killed. If someone from another clan breaks one of these taboos, he will fall into the same rejection and he and his family will suffer serious harm.

My predecessor at Tanjomoha, Fr. Vincent Carme, tried to remedy this terrible situation of exclusion. He became one of them, defying the taboos, going to live among them and staying in the little huts in two of their principal villages. He worked at their promotion through education and evangelization.

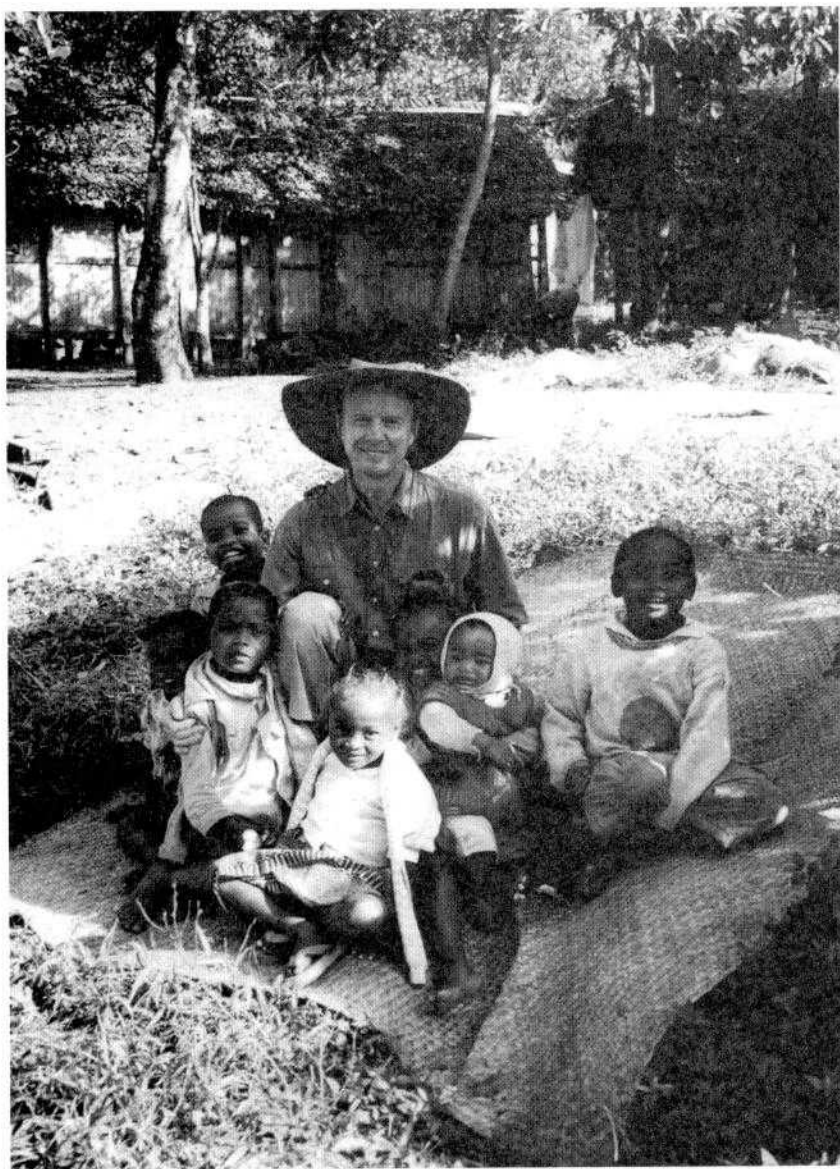
I think that there are two levers which will make the barriers of exclusion fall:

1. The Gospel: I provide regular spiritual animation in these villages; moreover, I have preached short missions in these villages and in the neighboring villages. These bore



fruits of reconciliation and established connections among the opposing clans.

2. Education: I continue to support sewing classes in the villages, as well as the hostel for the young rejected



persons in Tanjomoha, who are studying in Vohipeno. We are ready to implement a new and important educational project, the creation of a private nursery and elementary school in Tanantsara, one of the principal villages of the rejected persons.

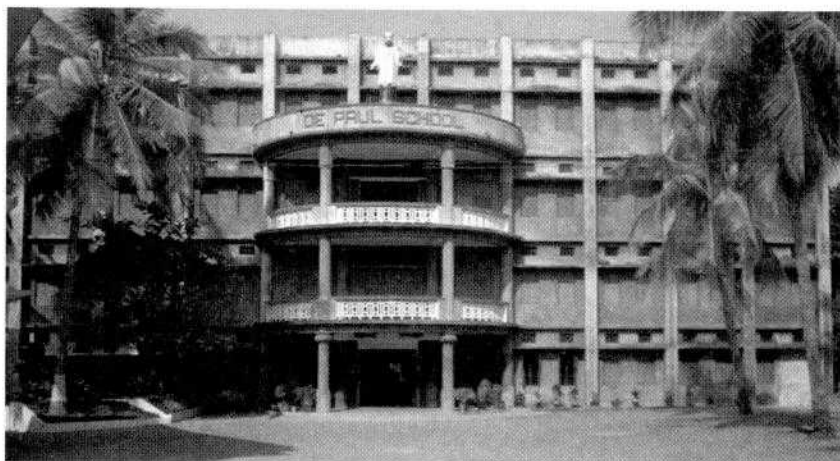
The purpose of the Tanantsara's primary school, like all the other educational projects mentioned above, is to make fall the barriers of exclusion and scorn, of which this clan of rejected persons is the victim:

1. by offering a good scholastic education to these rejected young persons;
2. by promoting, at the same time, the integration of these young people into the surrounding society.

### **Province of North India**

Fr. Vincent loved children and cared much for them, especially foundlings and orphans. He would shake the consciousness of the Ladies of Charity saying: "You have become their mothers by adoption and by abandoning them you become their executioners." We, the Vincentians in India, have inherited his passion for the well being of children. They enjoy the highest priority in our evangelization efforts. We concentrate on their education. We do it by running schools and hostels.

Hostels are shelter homes for children for a specific purpose: their schooling. We work in rural areas, which are typically mountainous terrains. The villages are scattered in the jungles. Some

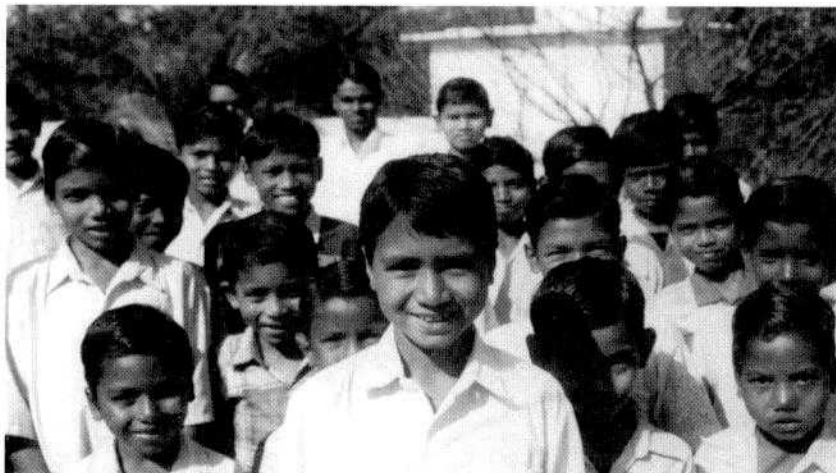


are too small to have a school and, in addition, there are no proper roads connecting these villages. Hence many children remain deprived of schooling. An alternative is to gather them in a place where there are schools. Right from the beginning our veteran missionaries did that. In fact, every mission station began with a small house by way of a shelter for the missionaries and a few children gathered from the villages for schooling. At present we have 21 hostels in which 1491 children stay and attend nearby schools. The children are provided with accommodation, food, clothing, etc. Obviously these children come from very poor families.

Ethnically 85% of them are tribal children and the others are Dalits, considered low castes. Both groups occupy the lowest rung of the social ladder economically, socially and politically.

Our hostels have positive effects on the poor segment of society in three ways:

1. The poor are powerless because of their lack of knowledge and awareness. Our hostels help to change this situation.
2. A Catholic atmosphere envelops the hostels and the residents learn the first lessons of Christian life there. They become catechists in their villages, thus opening the way for Christ. Understandably, the hostels have become an integral part of our evangelization work.
3. Hostels are our most cherished possessions for they link us directly with the poor.



A new venture we have initiated aims at creating leaders from the very poor segment of society. Students are not able to make it to the top since they come from a very poor educational background. As a result, there is very little influence and presence in the administrative level from the poor segment. This has opened our eyes recently. Hence we launched this ambitious project, giving the best education to a selected few children.

In 2004 we started a hostel for that purpose. Poor children who are exceptionally clever are selected from the villages and brought to our hostel at Gopalpur-on-sea. They study at our school, which is one of the best in the locality for academic excellence and discipline.

The goal of our new venture is to produce leaders to work for the poor segment of society.

### **Province of Slovenia**

In May 2005, a new community was formed, caused by the necessity of circumstances. It gives young women the possibility of leaving their dysfunctional families to begin living a worthy life.

This community cropped up without foreseeing it; that is, without any special planning. But we see it as a new way of responding to the difficult situations of the present time. This work is an extension of the spiritual and therapeutic accompaniment carried out by Vincentian Father Dr. Peter Žakelj, as well as his efforts to work with youth.

Those in the community are all young women over 18 years of age. They come from families where there was very difficult physical





and psychic abuse (alcoholism, sexual violence, emotional negligence and low employment).

For these young women, the community represents a new home, a new beginning, where they can have lively relationships which orient them toward freedom.

The purpose of the project is to give the young women the possibility of going beyond the dysfunctional relationships in their families and begin living a free and responsible life.

### **Province of Peru**

Brief history of the project: It refers to the formation of the Progressive Housing Development of Social Interest "El Huarango - Tierra Prometida (El Huarango - Promised Land)," considered of extreme poverty and situated in a desert area of the Province and Department of Ica, Peru. There are approximately 200 families coming from the resettlement of a sector of the population affected by the flooding of the Ica River in 1998 and who were totally helpless.

The accompaniment offered by the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian confreres of the Congregation of the Mission from the beginning of the formation of this village aroused hope in the middle of the desert.



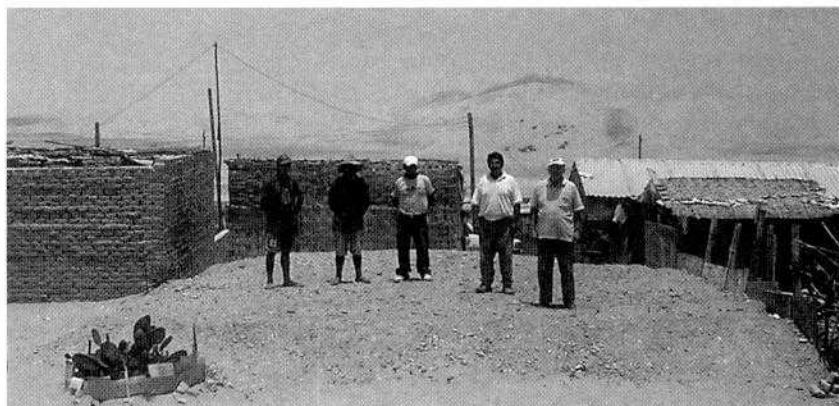


Community evangelization is promoted and encouraged through the central committee, the mothers' club and the local meetings, using a methodology of participative work, which responds to basic necessities.

Purpose of the project: a better quality of life for the 200 families through the areas of health, education, nutrition, recreation, ecology, and religion.

Specific objectives:

1. Drilling a tubular well for the water supply;
2. Planting of trees in the streets of the village;
3. Lectures on preventive health care.





**Eastern Province, USA**

The unjust structures that burden the poor manifest themselves in many ways, including access to higher education, access to medical care, entrance into labor markets, participation in the marketplace, and access to technology. To begin to address some of these seemingly intractable issues, the Vincentian community at Niagara University, under confrere Joseph L. Levesque, proposes to develop an inter-faith institute of public ministry. It is our contention that leaders in the faith community know how to effectively serve the poor. Therefore, by building their capacity to do so and by assisting them in pursuing available resources, we will better be able to promote and effect the sort of systemic change that is consistent with the aims of this award and that is sought by the Congregation of the Mission.

The message to protect and uplift the poor has to be carried by those who serve the poor. Yet, addressing the unjust structures experienced by the disenfranchised requires the strength of voice. As church communities weaken, so do their voices. Our proposal seeks to empower religious leaders in a poor urban environment with the knowledge and understanding of ways to assist their churches. This proposal will increase the ability of the faith community to impact positively on the lives of the poor in our community and will develop



a replicable model that may be used in other areas of the region, state, nation and world.

Brief history: While businesses have closed, companies have relocated and those with means have migrated out of the city of Niagara Falls, the faith community has remained as the beacon of light in most poor neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the churches too have suffered from a decline in membership and available social and economic capital. Nonetheless, the churches have continued steadfast, and the core of the faith-based community remains resolute in its commitment to helping the community and their congregations. To this day, the churches still provide the most direct means of touching the residents in these communities.

The overarching goal of this project is to develop a model of public ministry in the spirit of St. Vincent that addresses urgent community needs by empowering individuals to think and act creatively to help themselves and their communities.

The specific goals are:

1. To build the capacity of the faith-based institutions serving the disenfranchised and poor areas in the city of Niagara Falls;
2. To provide training and development opportunities for members of the local faith community;
3. To provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of issues and topics critical to serving the urban poor in our community.

To meet the above goals, the following objectives will be accomplished:

1. Establish the Inter-Faith Institute of Public Ministry;
2. Conduct a needs assessment of the faith-based community in Niagara Falls;
3. Develop a board of community advisors from a broad cross-section of the inter-faith community in Niagara Falls, to include ministers, youth, lay pastoral agents and other leaders;
4. Design an easy-to-read, well-organized and interactive web site;
5. Host bi-monthly workshops at Niagara University for Church members of all ages on a variety of topics that include resource building such as grant writing, discussions about topics and issues that are plaguing poor communities;

6. Design and host one moderated strategic planning session;
7. Produce a series of pamphlets and brief publications.

In closing, I would like to remind all of you of the objective of the Systemic Change Award: "To acknowledge and support specific projects developed by individuals or groups of confreres, whether specifically missionary or not, that reflect St. Vincent's creativity in responding to the needs of the Church and/or help promote systemic change of unjust structures which oppress the poor."

I thank the recipients of this award for their creativity and efforts to bring about systemic change in the life of the poor. I hope that the projects presented above will help to stimulate that creativity among confreres in other provinces.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
*Superior General*

### *To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

As we begin Lent, let us do so by reflecting on Mary, a true disciple of Jesus, who can help us enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love for us during this holy season. The Scriptures say much about her witness and reveal to us her role as disciple.

But let us focus on the cross of Jesus Christ, where his death is played out once and for all time, and reflect on Mary's role in this eminently significant and dramatic moment in the life of her Son. Mary is a mother who suffers the death of her child, a child whom she held in her arms when he came into the world and now will hold again having left this world. What sorrow she must have felt. What pain must have pierced her heart, that pain of which Simeon, the prophet, spoke: "(And you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35). What is Mary doing at the foot of the cross? She is not trying to stop the execution; she is not protesting Jesus' innocence. Mary's presence is mentioned only by John in his Gospel. He says she just stood there (John 19:25). Perhaps this is a position of strength and courage. Maybe, just maybe, Mary was pondering, in the biblical sense of the word.

To ponder, in the biblical sense,<sup>1</sup> is to hold, carry, and transform tension so as not to give it back in kind. Obviously, Jesus models this kind of pondering for us as well. He took in hatred, held it, transformed it, and gave back love and forgiveness. To ponder biblically is to be like a water purifier; it takes in all kinds of impurities with the water, but holds the impurities inside of itself and gives back only pure water. Mary shows the path a model disciple should follow: ponder, meditate, treasure in the heart, hold and transform tension.

I would like to invite you, sometime during this Lenten season, to set aside time to contemplate Mary at the foot of the cross of her Son. In that reflection, put yourself in Mary's place. What do you see

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., writings of Ron Rolheiser, OMI, president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He is a community builder, lecturer and writer. His books are popular throughout the English-speaking world. He has a regular column in the *Western Catholic Reporter*, Canada's largest religious weekly, which is also carried by more than 50 newspapers worldwide.

as you look upon the face of the suffering Jesus? What are you pondering? What are the tensions that you are experiencing in your own life at this moment, which you need to hold onto, which you need to carry for awhile and then, with the grace of God, you need to transform?

I want to expand a little on the different words: hold, carry and transform:

- **Hold** means not to let go of immediately, to learn to accept. How difficult it is at times to accept when that which causes us tension can be embarrassing, uncomfortable. We have the immediate tendency to want to get rid of it, to drop it, to run away from it.
- **Carry** means to take the time to work through a process of reconciling oneself with the tension. This often means reconciling ourselves with those who provoke the tension that exists in our life. Reconciliation is not something that can happen immediately. It takes time. It takes patience. It takes courage. It takes understanding. It takes humility.
- **Transform** means to remake anew. It takes work. It takes struggle. It takes a lot of giving, as well as forgiving.

As we look on Mary, at the foot of the cross, pondering the face of her suffering Son, as we look to her Son, where do we see his suffering face today? It should not be very difficult for us, who are called to contemplate the face of Jesus in the face of the suffering poor whom we evangelize and serve, to see the faces of the poor in the face of the suffering Jesus.

- Look upon the face of the suffering Jesus and see those children abandoned by their own parents and wandering the streets of most major cities of our world today.
- Look at the suffering face of Jesus and see a young teenage girl who does not know what to do because, after not heeding the counsel of her parents with regard to the people with whom she associates, she has to break the news that she is pregnant. Does she listen to the counsel that thinks her suffering can be eased by encouraging her to abort? Or does she listen to herself and the temptation to run away, or even, in the extreme, out of fear of confronting her parents, to take her own life.
- As you contemplate the face of the suffering Jesus, see the face of the thousands and thousands of men, women, teenagers, and children who have fled from their homelands as immigrants with the hope of finding "a better life in another world," which many times has been

created through the modern means of advertisement and marketing today.

- As you look upon the suffering face of Jesus, see the thousands upon thousands of refugees who flee from their homelands to avoid violence and genocide, the experience of the hatred of brothers and sisters against brothers and sisters.
- As you look upon the suffering face of Jesus, see those same immigrants who are refugees being discriminated against or rejected by their host countries because they are different, because they are dirty, because their skin is a different color and they cannot speak the language.
- As you look upon the face of the suffering Jesus, see the face of the thousands upon thousands who die of hunger, malaria, AIDS, and other diseases, and whose cries for help appear to fall on deafened ears, because there are so many of them.
- As you look upon the suffering face of Jesus, see the thousands and thousands who fear for their lives in their own villages, in their own barrios, in their own towns, in their own homes because young people roam the streets in gangs with no fear of anyone or anything and with no respect for human life.
- As you look on the suffering face of Jesus, see also the thousands upon thousands of men and women who are imprisoned in inhuman conditions, many times awaiting long procedures for justice and feeling that justice will never come because they are poor and "who hears the cry of the poor?"

In his first encyclical, Benedict XVI speaks of contemplating the suffering of Christ.

"It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation, *we discover* the path along which *our life* and love must move."<sup>2</sup>

I pray that your contemplation of Mary, at the foot of the cross of her Son, Jesus, over the period of these 40 days of Lent, be a healing experience, as well as a journey through the heart of pain and despair of the poor of this world that gives way to hope. Jesus' own passion, death and resurrection assert that the evils of this world are not incurable and that injustice does not have the last word. Ponder

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<sup>2</sup> Cf., BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 12.

then, the suffering face of Christ. Take hold of the injustices of this world. Carry them in your heart and ask the grace of God to transform them and then give back tenfold justice, peace, understanding, reconciliation, love.<sup>3</sup>

As we do so, my brothers, let us contemplate the words of Blessed Marcantonio Durando, which is part of a prayer that the Nazarene Sisters say as they begin their night service of the sick and the poor.

*Jesus my Nazorean, here I am bowed down at your feet, to ask your blessing.... I intend to pass "this night" (this Lent) in prayer to honor the many nights that you spent in prayer for me and especially the night preceding your painful Passion.<sup>4</sup>*

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

*Superior General*

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<sup>3</sup> Note: I would like to thank Fr. John Sledziona, C.M., for some of the ideas in this letter. They are taken from a reflection that he gave on Mary and the Eucharist to the confreres of the New England Province.

<sup>4</sup> Marcantonio Durando, cited in LUIGI CHIEROTTI, *P. Marcantonio Durando*, Genova, Cooperazione Vincentiana, 1970, p. 385.

Rome, 13 March 2006

*To all Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Visitor,

*May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!*

I invite you and your council to submit a project from your province for the Mission Award 2006. Below, I have included information you will find helpful in identifying a project eligible for the award. You will also find an application form with this letter. The completed application should be submitted to the Econome General by June 1, 2006. The complete application must be signed by the Visitor or Vice-Visitor.

Please note:

1. Only one application can be submitted for each province or vice-province.
2. The application submitted must be no more than three pages in length.
3. Applications received after June 1, 2006 will not be considered.

**"MISSION AWARD"**

This is an award given to acknowledge and support a specific project, developed by an individual confrere or group of confreres, which promotes in a noteworthy way their missionary work. This award will be granted annually from 2006 to 2016.

Some criteria choosing the recipient(s) of the award:

1. The projects submitted should promote popular missions or missions *ad gentes* in a noteworthy way.
2. Creative formation programs for popular missions or missions *ad gentes* would be eligible.
3. Teams of confreres who have developed a creative missionary project, either for popular missions or for missions *ad gentes*, may submit a proposal.
4. Teams who have developed a creative project for a new possible mission will also be eligible.
5. Confreres or teams submitting proposals for the creative use of media in missions will also be eligible.



6. Creative programs for formation of the clergy in mission territories will also be eligible.

The Mission Award will be granted to at the most five projects on July 30, 2006, chosen by the Superior General with his council. The amount of \$100.000 will be divided equally among the projects that have been granted the award. The amount of the award to each individual project will be distributed over two years. The first half of the award money will be given to the project on July 30, 2006. The second half of the award money will be given on July 30, 2007 after the Superior General has received a report on how the first half of the award money was used.

I look forward to receiving an application from your province.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." in a cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

*Superior General*

## APPLICATION FOR THE "MISSION AWARD 2006"

How does the project fit the criteria of the Mission Award?

Provide a brief history of the project.

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What is the goal of the project?

A "goal" is a simple, one-sentence statement about the general purpose of the project that addresses the specific need stated above. Example: "To train members of the Vincentian Family to give missions in St. Vincent's Parish."

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What are the objectives for the project?

The "objectives" are specific, concrete and measurable results that accomplish the goal of the project. Example: "To hold missionary training workshops for 5 consecutive Saturdays in the parish hall."

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If the project should receive the Mission Award, how will the award money be utilized to meet the goal of the project?

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If the project should receive the Mission Award, who will be responsible for submitting the report to the Superior General on how the award money was utilized? Please note that the second half of the award money will not be distributed unless this report has been received.

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Signature of the Visitor or Vicevisitor

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Date

Rome, 15 March 2006

*Feast of St. Louise de Marillac*

***"Love is infinitely creative"***

(SV XI, 146)

***To the members of the Congregation of the Mission***

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

I write with regard to our most recent *tempo forte* council meeting from 6-10 March.

1. We discussed the possible **International Development Office** for the Congregation of the Mission. We received a first report from Fr. Carl Pieber and the ad hoc committee he chaired on this possible project. We are not at the point where we want to begin the Development Office, but we will continue to look for different ways to solicit funds to help us match the very generous offer that has been made which will help us to establish patrimonial funds for the remaining poorer provinces of the Congregation.
2. We talked about the **Vincentian holy places**, based on a meeting that I had with the Visitor of Toulouse and the Superior of the Maison-Mère on the Rue de Sèvres. There is a real interest on the part of the council to try to fulfill one of the postulata from the General Assembly, which asked that we might highlight the historical memory of the Congregation of the Mission, in particular, St. Vincent's birthplace in the Berceau and the Chapel on the Rue de Sèvres where his body rests. We hope, in some way, to encourage the entire Vincentian Family to promote these holy places as a way of helping us to deepen our charism and Vincentian spirituality.
3. Also present at the *tempo forte* meeting was the **Commission for the Revision of the Statutes**. The 2004 General Assembly proposed that we consider a revision of the Statutes for the 2010 General Assembly. The members of the Commission are: Frs. Alberto Vernaschi (Rome - coordinator), Giuseppe Turati (Turin), Juan Julián Díaz Catalán (Co-Director of CIF), Eli Chaves dos Santos (Rio de Janeiro), and Paul Golden (Midwest USA). A letter will be sent to the Visitors shortly concerning the process for the revision of the Statutes. It will take into

consideration participation from the grassroots level, including the Visitor and his Council, the Visitors' Meeting in Mexico in 2007, and Domestic Assemblies as preparation for the 2010 General Assembly.

4. The **Commission to help confreres in difficult situations** was also present at our meeting. The members of that Commission are: Frs. Varghese Thottamkara (Procurator General - coordinator), Michael Joyce (Midwest USA), Wiel Bellemakers (Holland) and Carlos Albeiro Velásquez Bravo (Colombia). The purpose of the Commission was to prepare a workshop (Rome, 10-16 January 2007) to help Visitors and/or persons they designate to learn to facilitate processes for helping confreres in difficult situations.

We hope that it will have a two-fold purpose: a forum to discuss why confreres get into difficult situations and how we might be able to prevent such desertions from the Congregation; and a means of preparing confreres to help those in difficult situations and/or to facilitate the process of separating them from the Congregation legally. This Commission prepared a questionnaire for the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission to help it orient the direction this workshop will take.

5. We discussed the report of the first meeting of the **Think Tank Commission**, which had met the previous week from 27 February to 2 March. The members of this Commission are: Frs. Robert P. Maloney (USA Eastern - coordinator), Norberto Carcellar (Philippines), Pedro Opeka (Madagascar), Joseph Foley (USA Eastern, UN NGO Representative for the CM), Sr. Ellen Flynn, D.C. (Great Britain), Mrs. Patricia de Nava (AIC), and Mr. Eugene Smith (SSVP). There were also two resource persons who participated in this first meeting: Fr. Dan McDonald, S.J., from the Gregorian University in Rome and Mr. Marco Tavanti from the Vincent De Paul Leadership Project of De Paul University in Chicago.

Their mandate had as its object to bring about systemic change through the apostolates of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially those ministering to the oppressed poor. They had a very lively interchange, speaking about effective strategies flowing from their experience of our Vincentian tradition in the service of the poor. It is a project that was originally established to promote the creativity of the members of the Congregation of the Mission, but we want to make this a Commission that is open to serve the entire Vincentian Family.

6. We discussed the search for a **new Treasurer General**. Fr. Elmer Bauer has asked us to begin looking for his replacement. Elmer has served generously in this position for seven years, so

we discussed possible candidates to replace him. He has assured us that he will be willing to remain as long as the transition with the new Treasurer requires. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Elmer for his fine service as the Treasurer General.

7. We also reflected on a memorandum from the Secretary General on the **statistics of the Congregation for 2005**. There were many interesting points. As of the end of 2005, there are 3424 incorporated members of the Congregation of the Mission. We have 918 non-ordained students. We have another 592 admitted members and aspirants to the Congregation. Seventy confreres died last year. When we examined our ministries, that with the greatest number of confreres is parish ministry, in which there are 877 priests, 22 brothers and 17 deacons, not including missionary parishes. The second category in which the greatest number of confreres work is missionary parishes with 213 priests, ten deacons and seven brothers. I find striking the gap between these first and second ministries in terms of the number of confreres involved in them. This needs to be reflected on seriously by the entire Congregation of the Mission.
8. We also did the evaluation of the **CIF program**. The highlights of that are some new initiatives that are being taken on by the coordinators of the program. One is a session having to do with community and apostolic leadership. This program will take place from 18 June to 14 July 2006. Also for this year, the 21<sup>st</sup> Ongoing Formation Program will be held from 10 September to 8 December. It is open to those who speak Spanish, Portuguese and English. The Heritage Program will only be held once this year from 30 April to 27 May and is for Spanish and Italian speakers. This program has had a very positive response so far in terms of participation.

The other new initiative is a mini-CIF program, which the directors will be offering in the summer of 2007. More details about that will be forthcoming. We also encouraged the directors to be actively involved in other programs of the Congregation, such as SIEV (International Secretariat for Vincentian Studies), as well as an openness to doing ongoing formation for the Conferences of CLAPVI, COVIAM, and APVC, in order to collaborate in the formation of confreres in those provinces. I take this opportunity to thank Frs. Hugh O'Donnell and Juan Julián Díaz Catalán for their generous service to the Congregation at the international level in and through the development of the CIF program.

9. In the quarterly report that Brother Peter Campbell gives us on the **Vincentian Solidarity Office**, he noted that the office was

able to secure, from December to March, close to \$200,000 in funding for 13 projects, eight of which were fully funded and five were partially funded. The office was also able to award \$15,000 in Micro-Project Grants to three projects. Other news from the Vincentian Solidarity Office is that Peter and his office are now working together to co-fund projects with COVIDE-AMVE, which is a Vincentian organism for cooperation for development and missionary action out of Spain, directed by Brother Francisco Berbegal Vázquez.

I take this occasion to thank publicly Brother Peter Campbell and Mr. Scott Fina for the fine work they are doing to help procure monies to underwrite projects presented by poorer provinces of the Congregation.

10. We had the report of Fr. Manuel Ginete, **Delegate for the Vincentian Family**. Among the interesting things that he mentioned in his report was the meeting of the heads of the International Vincentian Family in Paris from 27-29 January 2006. The main topics taken up at that meeting were the reports from each group on the activities of 2005 and projects for 2006, presentation on the De Paul Leadership Project, presentation on the Depaul Foundation, discussion on criteria for belonging to the Vincentian Family, report on the Campaign Against Malaria, presentation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's African Project and a general discussion on annual themes and international projects.

He also reported on the Fourth Meeting of the Latin American Vincentian Family in Bogotá, Colombia, from 12-18 February 2006. In place of Fr. Ginete, Sr. María Pilar López, who is the Executive Secretary of the Vincentian Family Office here in the Curia, participated and gave a talk on the spiritual dynamism of our solidarity with those most vulnerable. There were 117 participants from at least 11 different branches of the Vincentian Family in Latin America.

11. We had the report from Fr. Alfredo Becerra, who is responsible for **Vincentiana, Nuntia, and the website** here at the Curia ([www.cmglobal.org](http://www.cmglobal.org)). In his report on *Vincentiana*, he mentioned that the following issues remain to be published for 2005: 4 and 5, which will deal with the five Vincentian virtues today, and 6 which will be a second volume highlighting some lesser-known confreres. Alfredo also gave a rundown of the themes of *Vincentiana* for 2006. The first issue will deal with Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* and the Vincentian charism.
12. We had a report from Fr. John Freund on the **famvin website**. Among other interesting things that John mentioned is the

project that he did in conjunction with the members of SIEV, which is a collection of *Vincentiana* on CD. One hundred copies of these are now available.

13. Fr. José Antonio Ubillús, the **Assistant for the Missions**, presented his first draft of the Statutes of the International Missions. We also discussed an informal report on the Superior General's visit to the international mission of El Alto, Bolivia, from 18-25 February. The mission at this time has three missionaries and five places of apostolic activity. The confreres are: Frs. Aníbal Vera (Peru), the superior; Abdo Eid (Orient), the veteran of the group and accompanier of the three candidates in the discernment house; Diego Plá (Madrid), the youngest of the missionaries.

They are awaiting the arrival of two new missionaries who have been assigned there: Fernando Sánchez (Argentina), who will arrive shortly; and Cyrille de Nanteuil (Paris), who will join the missionary team sometime in the near future. We discussed the names of two more volunteers for the missions whose letters have arrived on the desk of the Superior General. At this time we are doing the usual consultation with regard to their future placement.

These are some of the matters we discussed in our last *tempo forte*.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.".

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

*Superior General*

Rome, 29 March 2006

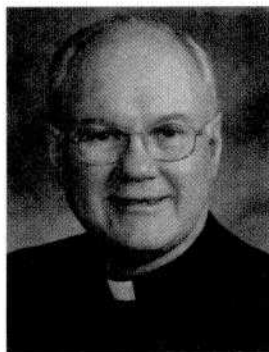
*To the Visitors of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your heart now and forever!

As I mentioned in my circular of 15 March, which concerned our most recent *tempo forte* council meeting, we had begun looking for a new Treasurer General to replace Fr. Elmer Bauer. Today I write to inform you that we have found one. Fr. John Gouldrick has accepted graciously our request that he take up this service for the worldwide Congregation and the Eastern Province is making the sacrifice, equally graciously, of a valuable confrere.

Let me offer you a brief presentation of Fr. Gouldrick. He was born on 5 May 1941 in Victor, New York. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on 19 June 1962 and was ordained to the priesthood on 30 May 1969. He has served in a variety of ministries over the past 35 years including that of Provincial Treasurer of the Eastern Province. He is presently the superior at the Central House in Philadelphia. I believe that he comes to us very well prepared to serve as Treasurer General.



We expect him to arrive in Rome sometime in September. Fr. Elmer Bauer and he will be working out the details of the transition and Fr. Elmer will stay on as long as necessary to assure that the changeover is smooth.

I trust that you join me in welcoming Fr. Gouldrick to this new service and in thanking Fr. Bauer for the generosity with which he has fulfilled this position for the past seven years.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M.". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "G.M." at the end.

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
*Superior General*



## 2005 ANNUAL STATISTICS - CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION

### MINISTRIES

Number of confreres involved in the ministries listed below. Each confrere is **counted only once**, considered under his principal ministry, as of 31 December 2005.

MINISTRY	BISHOPS	PRIESTS	DEACONS	BROTHERS	STUDENTS
1. Parish (popular) Missions to the faithful		105	2	1	5
2. Missionary parishes or districts	13	213	7	7	5
3. Parishes	3	877	17	22	6
4. Pilgrimage sanctuaries		48		3	
5. Seminaries and clerical formation		134	3	3	8
6. Formation of our own exclusively	2	180	2	4	1
7. Missions <i>Ad Gentes</i>	1	157	1	6	
8. Daughters of Charity (Director, chaplain)		146			
9. Schools (primary, secondary, superior, professional)		172	2	13	
10. Social Communications (publications, radio, television)		25		1	
11. Special studies		102	20	2	23
12. Chaplains: military, immigrants, hospital, associations		136		2	
13. Chaplains: Vincentian Lay Groups		71			
14. Direct Service of the Poor	1	49	3	12	
15. Manual work		5		36	
16. Administration		125	1	6	
17. Retired, ill, convalescing	2	313	2	40	
18. Other	9	85	4	9	4
19. Absence from the Congregation		153	8	1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3096</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>52</b>

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2005								ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2005											
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanents Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS						
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Min. Sem.		Prep. Year		TOTAL
														AS	AH	AS	AH	AS	AH	
General Curia	4	0	7	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>123</b>
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	6		28			1	2	31	47		1		48					8		8
Ethiopia	4	2	37	5		3		47	9	1			10			15				15
Madagascar	9		81	3		3	1	91	21	3			24		2	9		3		14
Mozambique	5	1	15			2	1	19	4	1			5	14	2			2		18
Nigeria	9		51	6				57	66				66	23						23
St. Justin de Jacobis - Eritrea	7		35				5	40	13				13			45				45
<b>AMERICA</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1064</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1177</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>238</b>
Argentina	8		41	1			1	43	7				7	5				2		7
Brazil - Curitiba	9	3	61	2		2		68					0					6		6
Brazil - Fortaleza	3		34	2				36	1				1	4				3		7
Brazil - Rio de Janeiro	12	3	62	3		6	2	76	16	3			19	8				13	1	22
Central America	9	3	38			2		43	2				2	7		1		3		11
Chile	7		22	1		2	2	27	5				5	8						8
Colombia	23	2	160	3		10	1	176	40				40	108	5					113
Costa Rica	4		15			2	1	18	3	1			4	2						2
Cuba	5		12					12	1				1	1						1
Ecuador	5		29	3				32	3				3	4				3		7

Mexico	22	1	96	2		4	1	104					0			15			15	
Peru	12	1	55	1		1	1	59	5				5			3			3	
Puerto Rico	15		53	1		5		59	15				15	8		7		6	21	
USA - Eastern	25	1	154			10		165	3				3				11		11	
USA - Midwest	13		105	2		17		124	5				5						0	
USA - New England	7		27			1		28					0						0	
USA - Southern	5		19			1		20					0						0	
USA - West	8		30		1	3		34	1				1	1					1	
Venezuela	12		51				2	53	5				5	3					3	
ASIA	61	3	398	8	0	13	5	427	175	1	1	0	177	28	1	137	1	17	0	184
China	4		39			1		40			1		1	3				2	5	
India (North)	11		82	2		2	5	90	45				45				3		3	
India (South)	11	1	74			3		78	43				43			55	1	8	64	
Indonesia	11		71	3		3		77	75				75			82			82	
Orient	9	1	36	1		1		39	1				1				4		4	
Philippines	15	1	96	2		4		103	11	1			12	25	1				26	
EUROPE	223	11	1326	23	4	73	27	1464	95	2	0	0	97	29	1	3	0	10	1	44
Austria	5		17			3		20	1				1						0	
Belgium	3		12					12					0						0	
France - Paris	21		138	13		12	14	177	11				11	10				7	1	18
France - Toulouse	11		58			7	1	66	2	2			4						0	
Germany	3		13	1		2		16	2				2				1		1	
Holland	5		53			1		54					0						0	
Hungary	3		15					15	2				2	3					3	
Ireland	13		71					71					0						0	

PROVINCES	HOUSES & INCORPORATED MEMBERS BY PROVINCE - 2005								ADMITTED MEMBERS & ASPIRANTS BY PROVINCE - 2005													
	Houses	Bishops	Priests	Deacons	Permanent Deacons	Brothers	Students with Vows	TOTAL	ADMITTED MEMBERS					ASPIRANTS								
									CP	CB	P*	PD*	TOTAL	Voc. Grps.		Min. Sem.		Prep. Year		TOTAL		
														AS	AH	AS	AH	AS	AH			
Italy - Naples	11	2	50	1		2		55						0	2	1						3
Italy - Rome	10	1	52		1	3		57	3				3								0	
Italy - Turin	15		77		2	2	1	82	1				1	2							2	
Poland	29	3	251	3		5	6	268	38				38								0	
Portugal	11	1	53			1		55	2				2	5							5	
Slovakia	7		32	2		3		37	9				9								0	
Slovenia	8	2	47	1		3	1	54	2				2	1							1	
Spain - Barcelona	8	1	45			2	1	49					0	4							4	
Spain - Madrid	16		112			15	1	128	2				2								0	
Spain - Salamanca	19		88			10	1	99					0								0	
Spain - Zaragoza	19		120		1	2	1	124	10				10			3		2			5	
SS. Cyril and Methodius	6	1	22	2				25	10				10	2							2	
OCEANIA	7	0	54	1	0	4	0	59	4	0	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Australia	7		54	1		4		59	4				4	3							3	
TOTAL	539	30+1 Pat	3096	67	5	168	52	3419	546	12	2	0	560	256	11	235	1	81	8	592		

CP = Candidates to the Priesthood; CB = Candidates to the Brotherhood; P = Priests; PD = Permanent Deacons; P\*/PD\* Priests/Permanent Deacons coming from a diocese or another Institute; AS = Aspirants to the Priesthood; AH = Aspirants to the Brotherhood.

# FEATURE:

## *The Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est and the Vincentian Charisma*

### Presentation

by Alfredo Becerra Vázquez, C.M.

*Editor of "Vincentiana"*

This year 2006, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Vincentiana*. Without a doubt this is a cause of great joy for the whole Congregation.

In this present edition we offer six reflections on the first encyclical letter of our Holy Father, Benedict XVI. These articles are written by Vincentian confreres living in different geographical areas where the Congregation of the Mission is present.

**Andrés Motto** offers us a reflection that is entitled: *The Practice of Love and the Vincentian Charisma*. He presents us with a renewed Vincentian reading in regard to the practical ways of love and examines the second part of the encyclical from the perspective of the thinking of Saint Vincent de Paul.

In the second reflection, that of **Yosief Zeracristos**, entitled: *The Encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, and its African Reception*, the author shares with us his hopes concerning the new Pontificate and the challenges that the Church in Africa, in light of the encyclical, is called to live.

*Deus Caritas Est in Latin America* is the title of **José Evangelista de Souza's** article. He offers us some considerations that are meant

to deepen the Vincentian spirituality in Latin America. Therefore, he first of all comments on the encyclical and then examines the Papal document from the perspectiva of Saint Vincent's and Latin America's option on behalf of the poor.

The title of **Jimmy A. Belita's** contribution is *Reflections on Deus Caritas Est* and this presentation is made from an Asian perspective. The article at times hints at certain controversy.

**José-Vicente Martínez Muedra** in his article, *Charity: The Exercise of Love on the Part of the Church as a "Community of Love,"* begins his reflection by insisting on the Trinitarian configuration of the Congregation. He comments on various points of the encyclical (charity as a manifestation of the Trinitarian love and a task of the Church; justice and charity, the specific outlines of the Church's activity and those who are responsible for the charitable action of the Church and then a conclusión).

Finally, **Giuseppe Guerra** in his article *Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the Encyclical* speaks with us about the essence of Christianity: love. Christianity's teaching about the fundamental principle of love is made concrete in a lived testimony such as is seen in the life of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. Holiness, however, ought to be a reality not only of the past but also of the present.

These are the primary lines of this present edition. We hope this will be useful to all of you to begin to walk together toward holiness.

# Love and Ecstasy

by Frei Betto<sup>1</sup>

*Dominican Friar*

The encyclical, "God is Love," the first by the new pope, surprises us positively in many respects.<sup>2</sup> However, the floral style makes it difficult to engage young readers. Benedict XVI breaks with the majestic rhetoric, agreeable to the tastes of popes and cardinals, so that he might speak in the first person: "In my first encyclical I wish to speak of love." He addresses love by referring to not only Christian and non-Christian authors, but also to those of pagan antiquity and others whose works were prohibited by the Church, such as, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Gassendi, Descartes, and Nietzsche.

The papacy is speaking with a new emphasis. Notably absent from the encyclical are condemnations, scrupulosity and moralizing. Love is incarnate in its total dimension, namely, that of relationship with God, neighbor, and society. The author does not retreat into poetic raptures. Rather, he rises above the habitual dualism of ecclesiastical tradition: "Love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison (no. 2)." In addition the author praises the "boldly erotic images" used by the prophets Hosea and Ezekiel, as well as those from the *Song of Songs* (See nos. 9-10).

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<sup>1</sup> He is a Dominican friar from Brazil, internationally renowned as a theologian of liberation. He is an author of 53 books of various literary genres—novel, essays, detective stories, memoirs, youth and child stories, and religious themes. On two occasions, in 1985 and 2005, he received the Jabuti, the literary prize of his country. In 1986 he was elected "The Intellectual of the Year" presented by the Brazilian Writer's Union. Moreover, he moderates social movements such as Base Christian Communities and the Landless Rural Farmers. He has participated actively for 45 years in the political life of Brazil. From 2003-2004 he was a special assistant to President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, and coordinator of the program Social Mobilization of Zero Hunger.

<sup>2</sup> Text for the English translation, *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005) available found at based on the electronic format found [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html)

Criticizing the Platonic vision, so frequent in the tradition of the Church, the pope offers a *mea culpa*: "Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed (no. 5)." He stresses that "neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love — *eros* — able to mature and attain its grandeur (no. 5)."

Benedict XVI evokes Greek pedagogy in order to interpret various dimensions of love: *eros*, the passionate attraction that subjugates reason; *filia*, the love shared by friends; and *agape*, the care of another, sacrifice of oneself, and the openness to the transcendent. This last type brings love to its fulfillment, and "not the immersion into the blissful drunkenness," but the well-being of the beloved. "Love is indeed 'ecstasy,' not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God... (no. 6)."

Benedict XVI could have included a fourth destructive aspect, pornography. This perversion of love centers on the pleasure found in oneself at the cost of denigrating another.

The pontiff refuses the antinomy between *eros* and *agape*. "Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations that are fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life (no. 7)." He emphasizes: "Fundamentally, 'love' is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love (no. 8)."

The encyclical underlines this dimension of love which liberation theology emphasizes: Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40). "Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God (no. 15)."

In an exquisitely wrought statement, the Pope affirms the following: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*) (no. 25)." The pope adds: "The Church is God's



family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life (no. 25)."

"These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being (no. 25)."

In developing this manner of thinking, the papal document recognizes the pertinacity of the Marxist critique that contains "some truth" to its argument (no. 26). Benedict writes: "It must be admitted that the Church's leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way (no. 27)." Moreover, in an intransigent defense of the autonomy of political life and the laity's role in the State, Benedict underlines, that in the search for justice "politics and faith meet (no. 28)," and he makes clear that "it [the Church] has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith (no. 28)."

The Church is not able make politics a matter of confessing a faith, and neither does this view relegate religion to the sacristy: "The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice (no. 28)." Neither does the Church involve itself in works of charity as a means of proselytizing: "Those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love (no. 31)."

The encyclical about love would be more complete if it would have integrated elements of the present world order by taking up the wholesale critique that John Paul II made concerning neo-liberalism, the invasion of Iraq, and neo-colonialism — as reflected in the debt that drains the life blood from poor nations. These realities constitute the present impediments to a "*civilization of love*" called forth by Paul VI.

(GREGORY J. SEMENIUK, C.M., translator)

# The Practice of Love and the Vincentian Charisma

by Andrés Motto, C.M.

*Province of Argentina*

The first encyclical letter of Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*,<sup>1</sup> responds to two basic questions: 1) Can one really love God? 2) Can one authentically love the neighbor when this might appear to be foreign to us, or even more, might disturb us? In other words, in the midst of a violent era (where religious aggression is present) and at the beginning of his Pontificate, it is good that the Pope reminds us about that which is central to Christianity: love.

Faithful to the theology of holiness, the conclusion of the document makes reference to various saints who are outstanding for their practice of social charity. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac are among those explicitly mentioned (cf. DCE 40). Since they are mentioned in this document and since the question about loving God and neighbor is raised, we believe that it is a good time to engage in a Vincentian reflection on the practical ways of love. In order to accomplish this we shall apply the thoughts of our Founder to the second part of the encyclical. The second section is very concrete and limited in its scope; that is, it points out some aspects concerning the practice of love. The central question is the following: Is charitable help that Christians undertake on behalf of those in need — is this help still valid? As we shall see, the future of our existence and ministry is in play as we attempt to respond to this question.

## Models of love

Benedict XVI sees the Holy Trinity as the source of love-charity. He presents Trinitarian love not merely *ad intra* but as fundamentally *ad extra* (cf. DCE 30). His second reference is to the primitive Church. Here he makes an interesting biblical reference and then an

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<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter "Deus Caritas Est,"* was published on 25 January 2006. Hereafter this document will be cited as DCE.

historical reference in which he highlights the enduring concern of the primitive Church that no one should be excluded from rejoicing in the necessary material goods that enable people to live with dignity. Indeed, this form of assistance is not limited to those persons who are members of the Church, but is extended to all those who are in need (cf. DCE 20-25).

It is interesting to analyze the fact that when St. Vincent refers to the source of love, he also holds forth the Triune God and the primitive Church. Thus, when he refers to God,<sup>2</sup> he points out that God is always love and love in ever new ways. God's love is creative.<sup>3</sup> God desires certain things of men and women but God does not ask them to do what they cannot do.<sup>4</sup> Vincent compares the goodness of God to the goodness of a kind father:

*Once God conceives an affection for a soul He will bear with it, no matter what it may do. Have you ever seen a father with a little child that he loves dearly? He puts up with all that the child does to him, nay, even he sometimes says to it: "Bite me, my child?" How comes this? It is because he loves this little child. God behaves in the same way toward us.<sup>5</sup>*

Vincent understands that God is infinite love and this love explains the unity of God and the distinction of persons in God. Charity is present at the beginning and constitutes the divine Persons, constitutes their communion.<sup>6</sup> Vincent liked to contemplate the Trinitarian mystery *ad extra* as an unfathomable mystery of love that leads to action for communion. Thus, the divine processions are an exchange of love.

Vincent also contemplated the Trinitarian mystery from the perspective of the economy of salvation. He views the Trinitarian missions as another expression of love. He also highlights the unity of the divine work as he states that the whole work *ad extra* constitutes the three persons: the three persons are agents of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. GIUSEPPE TOSCANI, "Dios," in COLLECTION, *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana*, CEME, Salamanca 1995, pp. 119-141; MIGUEL LLORET, *La comunidad vicenciana, realidad viva de fe*, in COLLECTION, *Identidad Vicenciana en un mundo de increencia*, CEME, Salamanca 1990, pp. 161-180.

<sup>3</sup> As Vincent says good-bye to St. Louise, he expresses this conviction in his letter: *I wish you a young heart and a love in its first bloom for Him Who loves us unceasingly and as tenderly as if he were just beginning to love us. For all God's pleasures are ever new and full of variety, although he never changes* (SV I, 416-417; English edition I, 408).

<sup>4</sup> *God wills only what is within your power* (SV VIII, 42; English edition VIII, 50).

<sup>5</sup> SV XI, 388; Repetition of Prayer, 19 November 1656.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SV XII, 256-257.

creation, incarnation, redemption and sanctification. Love occupies a primary place in the divine missions and in the consequent Trinitarian indwelling within women and men. God comes lovingly to dwell with humankind:

*... it is not only the Father who loves us but rather the three divine Persons come to us and dwell with us. Indeed, the souls that love the Lord are the dwelling places of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The souls that love the Lord are the places where the Father perpetually begets the Son and where the Holy Spirit unceasingly proceeds from the Father and the Son.<sup>7</sup>*

The most creative aspect of Vincentian Trinitarian theology is that it moves from a metaphysical contemplation of this mystery to viewing this mystery as an inspiring model for human interaction. Vincent draws from this mystery very concrete consequences and applies these consequences to a community that commits itself to God through service of the poor. In this way Vincent follows the example of the Triune God who joins his thoughts about himself to providence for the world. We ought to be concerned about the spiritual as well as the material dimensions of life and this applies to ourselves and to others:

*May it please the goodness of God that, according to your desire, they may not divert you from spiritual ones. May he share with us the eternal thoughts He has of himself while continuously giving His full attention to the direction of the world and to providing for the needs of all his creatures, even down to a tiny gnat!<sup>8</sup>*

Since the Triune God is perfect unity, communities ought to be a reflection of this unity and love. When a community fixes its eyes on the Trinity, then unity and charity come to life in this community. St. Vincent invites the members to *trinitarianize* their community because the mystery of the Trinity is the soul of the common life. Therefore, all the members of the community are called to live in full reciprocity, sharing their lives and apostolate:

*Since God is but One in Himself, and in God there are three Persons, without the Father being greater than the Son or the Son being greater than the Holy Spirit, it should be the same for the Daughters of Charity. They should be the image of the Most Holy Trinity; and even though they are several, they should form but one heart and one mind. Among the three*

<sup>7</sup> SV XI, 44; Conference to the Missionaries, *On the love of God* [undated].

<sup>8</sup> SV I, 475; English edition I, 463.

*Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, even though their operations are diverse and attributed to each one in particular, they are related to one another.... In like manner, among the Daughters of Charity the Sister who is with those who are poor must be in close contact with the Sister who looks after the children, and vice-versa.<sup>9</sup>*

A community that is inspired by the Trinity, is characterized by its kindness and by a love that wells up from the hearts of the individual members. Kindness allows for quality interactions to take place: a sharing of experiences that unlocks people's hearts.<sup>10</sup> The community will also be a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, the community ought to be a messenger of God's mercy that is expressed in gestures of forgiveness. St. Vincent was well aware of the difficulties involved in living together. He understood the problems that had to be confronted in order to achieve a true fraternal life. Therefore, he invites the members of the community to allow themselves to be guided by the goodness of God who is mindful of the least hints of goodness in each person. With this perspective and with infinite patience, men and women are transformed by love. This ought to be the behavior and attitude that all Christians assume toward their sisters and brothers.

Vincent asks superiors to be the first ones to practice this charity and humility. Inspired by the Triune God, he breaks the monarchical image of religious authority; he *demystifies* this image and orients authority toward service:

*And what is there in God? There is equality of persons and unity of essence. And what does that teach you, except that all of you, such as you are, must become one and equal. If there has to be a Superior — a Sister Servant — then she should be an example of virtue and humility to others: the first to ask forgiveness, the first to set aside her own opinion to follow that of another.<sup>11</sup>*

This Trinitarian reflection not only leads Vincent to reestablish the internal life of the community but also leads him to place the community at the service of restoring dignity to the poor. The members of the community live together in imitation of the Trinity

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<sup>9</sup> SV XIII, 633; English edition XIIIb, 274-275. This Vincentian teaching inspired St. Louise who wrote: *Remember me to all our sisters and tell them always to remember the advice of Monsieur Vincent especially forbearance and cordiality so as to honor the unity and the diversity of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity* (*Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, p. 289).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. SV XIII, 641; English edition XIIIb, 281.

<sup>11</sup> SV XIII, 634; English edition XIIIb, 275.

in order to attend to the poor. Our community is organized to serve the poor and from this community that serves the poor arises a contemplation of God's action in scripture. For St. Vincent, the God-community-of-love is unable to validate the deprivation of life that many groups of people are forced to endure. As poverty becomes more unjust, it also becomes clear that it results from the avarice of the powerful and not from a sterile earth. Therefore, the Vincentian community is not an end in itself but is a community for the mission. The community acquires its meaning in as much as it opens itself to others, especially the poor. To be together allows the members to discern, in a better way, the cries of the poor and thus come to their assistance.

Before speaking of the Trinity, one should *proclaim* this mystery by living in an environment of charity — charity within the community and charity that extends beyond the religious community. People should live together with one heart and one soul. If each community lived the divine life of perfect communion it would be a source of missionary enlightenment. That is, a community inspired by the Trinitarian model would possess an evangelizing mission and charity as essential elements. Thus as a missionary community, it would have to announce the Good News and invite all people to live the fullness of baptism that introduces them into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As St. Vincent points out the *ad intra* and *ad extra* dimensions of the Trinity, our community ought to live this double movement: love within the Congregation and missionary love, especially love for the most destitute. Indeed, the one form of love makes the other coherent. Thus we can see that for our Founder, Trinitarian theology is the foundation of his theology of charity. This loving meditation on the Trinity will be in the forefront of his mind as he structures the vocation, mission and community life of the Congregations and Confraternities that serve the poor.

With respect to the primitive Church, our Founder is convinced that there was no one who was poor because they combated any attachment to the goods of the earth.<sup>12</sup> This was a vice that he saw as

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<sup>12</sup> In this respect St. Vincent coincides with some humanists of the Renaissance who presented the primitive Church as one in which all things were shared by everyone. They also affirmed that the excessive desire to possess material goods provokes innumerable evils in men and women. Thomas More in *Utopia* states that all citizens are equal. There is no private property and differences in social status disappear. Work is performed in a balanced way so that the individual is not alienated. People work for six days so that they can dedicate themselves to other tasks (cf. MORO THOMAS, *Utopia*, Alianza, Madrid 1991). At the same time Erasmus of Rotterdam points out that the love of wealth is the greatest folly of humankind... and the Church

a reality in his own time and that seemed to become more pronounced among laity, religious and clerics:

*Fifteen conferences were held here to find out what was the cause of the wretched state of the Church and of ecclesiastics who are so attached to possessions and to the desire to amass them. It was pointed out that this has happened ever since ecclesiastical goods were divided so that each one was given his own share and portion. Because in the beginning, everything was held in common and each one was provided only with what he needed. Oh! how the Church flourished then and how virtuous and perfect were her ecclesiastics!*<sup>13</sup>

Vincent understands that the charity of the primitive Church was expressed through detachment. Progress in love demands giving oneself to God and being detached from material goods.<sup>14</sup> Thus the virtuous person is concerned about spiritual goods and serving the neighbor and like Diogenes of Sinope is looking for poverty. Vincent looks at the comfortable life of his time and affirms that evangelical poverty, as practiced by the primitive Church, leads to virtue. He adds this motivation: to love the lifestyle of a friend leads one to love that friend more and so love the friends of the friend.<sup>15</sup>

Inspired by the primitive Church, Vincent points out another way of practicing charity: in community life one should not speak to a brother about his faults, but at times it will be necessary to have recourse to the superior. The confrere implicated might go to the superior or another confrere might tell the superior that an individual confrere is not doing well. Vincent believes that one has an obligation in charity to tell the superior the notable faults and temptations of the neighbor.<sup>16</sup> Such an action is not seen as a procedure of pure discipline or some underhanded denunciation, but rather is seen as an act of charity. To act in this way opens up to us a series of reasons, but here we will point out the primary reason:<sup>17</sup>

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(cf. ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, *Elogio de la Locura*, Alianza, Madrid 1993, pp. 95-96, 115-124).

<sup>13</sup> SV XII, 364; Conference to the Missionaries, "On Vows," 7 November 1659. See also, SV XII, 378-379; Conference to the Missionaries, "On Poverty," 15 November 1659.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. SV XII, 61; Conference to the Missionaries, "On Silence," 20 September 1658.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SV X, 222; Conference to the Daughters of Charity, "On Poverty," 20 August 1656.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. SV XII, 362-364; Conference to the Missionaries, "On the obligation of acquainting the Superior with the notable faults and temptations of our neighbor," 24 October 1659.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 355-363.



to disclose faults to one in a position of authority was the practice of the primitive Church and, according to St. Vincent, said custom was maintained during the first four or five hundred years of the Church's history. Indeed, various saints publicly accused themselves of their faults, for example, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Paul, and St. Augustine.

Benedict XVI provides a list of saints who distinguished themselves in the practice of charity. He begins the list with St. Martin of Tours who lived during the fourth century (DCE 40). Vincent de Paul also motivated his communities by placing before them charitable figures such as St. Martin of Tours, St. Roch, St. Lawrence, St. Louis, King of France, and St. Francis Xavier. He makes special mention of St. Genevieve. As he narrates some details of their lives, he is moved as he remembers the charitable gesture of St. Martin of Tours in sharing his cloak with a poor person:

*Holy Church reverences him [Saint Martin] so that she represents Saint Martin to us on horseback, dividing his cloak to give half of it to a poor man. And Our Lord himself, to let His servant see how pleasing this act of charity was to Him, appeared to Saint Martin that night clad in half of his cloak. And that, Gentlemen and my Brethern, shows us how God and His Church, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, esteems the charity that is shown toward the poor.*<sup>18</sup>

### **Necessary conditions so that charity does not fade**

The second part of the encyclical continues to examine the complex bonds between charity and justice. It begins by affirming the fact that charitable works should never become an excuse to put aside the obligations of justice; for example, to collaborate with a home for the elderly does not excuse me from paying just salaries. In this respect we must recognize that on more than one occasion Christians have lived this mistaken and unintelligible practice of charity. Entering once again into the historical area, the encyclical points out that with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, the struggle for justice was rightly focused on the correct ordering of capital and work. Said question was slowly perceived by the Church

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<sup>18</sup> SV XI, 367; Repetition of Prayer, 11 November 1656. Note that the Christian community so valued charity that despite the fact that St. Martin became a bishop, popular devotion still remembers him as a catechumen and Roman soldier who shared his cloak with a poor person: *The Church has such esteem and veneration for this act of charity on the part of Saint Martin that she represents him to us, not as a Bishop or an Archbishop, although they are very great and lofty dignities, but she shows him to us on horseback, dressed as a soldier, cutting his cloak in half* (SV XII, 69; Repetition of Prayer, 11 November 1658).



and, if her response was a little late, nonetheless, it was very strong. The Church placed her answer in the context of what we call the Social Doctrine of the Church (DCE 26-27). The bonds between charity and justice led her to develop the connection between the Church and the State. The document clarifies the fact that political action is fundamentally a task of the State and social action must be just — a government that separates itself from justice becomes a band of thieves. The Church respects the legitimate autonomy of the State. At the same time, as a service to society, the Church offers humankind the Christian faith which purifies reason and helps the cause of justice — the virtue of justice is developed in an area that is free from all ethical blindness. Through self-reasoning it is possible to arrive at this much desired justice. On the other hand, Benedict XVI resolutely affirms the fact that the Church ought to exercise this service of love toward those who are in need. It would be a myth to think that in a very efficient State, the assistance of a group, distinct from the State, would become unnecessary. Therefore, it is legitimate that the Church has its own proper organizations that carry forward her social charity. The State should not view this action of the Church in a negative way but should understand that it is proper to an adult State to promote subsidiarity thus fomenting that which is good, especially toward those who suffer great pain.

Clearly the era of St. Vincent was quite distinct from that of Benedict XVI. At that time people did not speak about the Social Doctrine of the Church and people lived in a ritualistic State. Even so, Vincent de Paul knew how to unite charity with justice and he was pained to see these two realities separated. Thus with pain he said: *there is a great difference between being a Catholic and being an upright man.*<sup>19</sup> We know that for our Founder the love of neighbor was indissolubly united with love for God. The proof of one's love for God is seen in the way that one loves the neighbor. Love of neighbor ought to be concrete, constant and considerate. The charitable heart rejoices in doing good and is pained at the possibility of offending another. He remarks that for a Christian, the practice of charity is an obligation since this is a divine precept that applies to everyone. In fact those who practice charity fulfill the whole law because the laws of God point us toward charity.<sup>20</sup> Through charity all the demands of justice are fulfilled and an affective characteristic is given to this work, for it should be done in the spirit of helping a friend. Indeed, charity proposes a universal love:

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<sup>19</sup> SV II, 447; English edition II, 494.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. SV XII, 260; Conference to the Missionaries, "On Indifference," 16 May 1659.

*For charity performs such good to one's neighbor as may be fairly hoped for from a faithful friend.*<sup>21</sup>

When St. Vincent introduced people to charitable works in the world of the poor, he did not do this to calm their consciences, but rather to disturb their consciences. He provokes them to examine their conscience in a calm and adult manner to see if they were evangelizing in a just way. It is impossible to speak about true religion that is not interested and concerned about people or that exploits people. Indeed, the Vincentian organization of charity raises the question about God and the poor and places this question in the midst of the ongoing situation of spiritual and material misery, in the midst of the exploitation and injustice which the people experience. How can this situation be resolved? If the question comes from God and the poor, St. Vincent knew that the answer could only be given by God and the poor themselves. For Vincent, the coming of the Kingdom constitutes the center of Jesus' message (cf. Mark 1:14-15). The most surprising characteristic of this Kingdom is that the poor are destined for this Kingdom in a preferential way (cf. Luke 6:20). For Vincent de Paul to say that *the Kingdom of God is theirs* means to proclaim that Jesus defends the poor today as he did yesterday. On earth the Lord Jesus defended the poor and showered them with charity while acting justly toward them. In actuality, Jesus continues to act justly toward the poor to the degree that he finds instruments who are willing to continue his mission. The relationship between Christ and the poor and the poor with Christ takes on fundamental importance in the discovery of the dignity that the dispossessed assume within the Church. Vincentian ethics finds in the service of the poor a commitment to action that leads to the reestablishment of justice. Jesus Christ is the justice of God for the poor. In the conflicts of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the poor, without knowing it, were the bearers of the demands of God's justice.

Another Vincentian way of living in accord with charitable justice is to put aside every partisan spirit, not to abuse power nor utilize power against those people who are under our care and not to use power to promote improperly those who share our faith. In this regard it is interesting to note the words that Vincent wrote to Fr. Gallais, the superior of Sedan who wanted to defend a Catholic who was going to be tried in a place where the majority of the judges were Huguenots:

*And if it is on behalf of a Catholic against a member of that religion, how do you know if the Catholic is in the right in the*

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<sup>21</sup> SV XII, 264; Conference to the Missionaries, "On Charity," 30 May 1659.

*justice he is demanding? There is a great difference between being a Catholic and being an upright man.... "But," you may say to me, "could I watch a Catholic being oppressed by a member of the religion without doing something for him?" I reply that this oppression must have some cause and is due either to something the Catholic owes the Huguenot or some insult or injury done to him. Now, if one of these be the case, is it not fair that the Huguenot seek redress in justice? Is the Catholic less subject to the law because he is a Catholic, or do you have greater reason to get mixed up in his affair than Our Lord did in refusing to have anything to do with those of the man who complained to Him about his brother? "Yes, but the judges belong to the religion." That is true, but they are also lawyers who judge according to laws, customs and ordinances. In addition to following their conscience, they profess to be men of honor.*<sup>22</sup>

In reference to Vincentian morality, charity is constituted as primary but depends on the promotion of justice since charity is built in harmony with justice. Thus to be charitable implies that one is mindful of the obligation of justice. Only a charity that is misunderstood will be neglectful of those obligations. Placing a value on natural rights, Vincent pointed out that *the obligations of justice have priority over those of charity*.<sup>23</sup> Let us look at some examples: 1) Vincent asks a priest to respect the intentions of a donor of certain alms, even though there are many other needs to attend to, for *there is no act of charity that is not accompanied by justice*.<sup>24</sup> 2) Vincent speaks with a member of the Congregation of the Mission who is going to rescue captives in North Africa. He asks this person to recover the money that was sent to rescue a captive because he had used this money for another need. He points out the need to respect the obligation of justice for this is what makes us truly charitable.<sup>25</sup>

In fact both virtues are radically transformative and mutually powerful. On the one hand, justice does not allow charity to be stranded in intimacy. On the other hand, charity channels justice and enables it to avoid possible and frequent deviations toward legalism or excessive law suits and even cruelty and vengeance.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, charity marks a *plus sign* in human living. For without blemishing the rights of justice, charity can lead people to gratitude and the

<sup>22</sup> SV II, 447-450; English edition II, 494, 496.

<sup>23</sup> SV VII, 620; English edition VII, 633.

<sup>24</sup> SV II, 54; English edition II, 68. Cf. SV II, 61; English edition II, 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. SV V, 395; English edition V, 398.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SV V, 404; English edition V, 412.

renunciation of self for another. Then charity can demand legislation. Charity shows us to be guided by the love that is inscribed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

We know that the struggle for charity and justice is one of the great demands of our society. Vincentian ethics does not separate ardent charity from the struggle for justice. Service on behalf of the poor allows us to encounter the God who asks that justice be done for the poor. For St. Vincent, this means that we identify ourselves with the most intimate sentiments of God and that we imitate the behavior of the Son of God who came to evangelize the poor. This commitment to justice on behalf of the poor, which arises from charity, makes our faith real.

Continuing with the document, Benedict XVI recognizes the difficulties in proclaiming charity but continues with the positive note of his first encyclical and expresses hope about the real possibilities of practicing social charity: 1) means of communication allow us to know very quickly the needs of people; 2) there are many technical advances that have great potential in serving those in need; 3) States normally favor groups that assist others, freeing them from taxes and providing them with resources; 4) there has been an increase in the number of volunteers who have developed multiple services; 5) in many places the Church and the State collaborate in providing help to victims; 6) there is a greater cooperation between distinct Christian churches in assisting those on the margins of society (DCE 30).

The Pope offers a possible profile of those persons who work in charitable organizations: 1) they act in response to another's need; 2) they are professionally competent and they put their hearts into their work; 3) they are not connected to a political party or a specific ideology; 4) they do not act out of personal interest nor do they proselytize.

As we examine these reflections with a Vincentian perspective, there will be many themes to analyze. Because of the brevity of this article, I will refer to only one theme. Since the Pope asks that charitable work be practiced with skill and kindness, this leads us to a profound reflection on the Vincentian doctrine of effective and affective love. When we refer to the effects of God's love, we immediately become involved in this dual division of love.<sup>27</sup> Vincent

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<sup>27</sup> This teaching is taken from St. Francis de Sales (cf. ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Book IV). This teaching also inspired St. Bernard (cf. ST. BERNARD, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Sermon 50). In other words, St. Vincent continued the *affective school* (*schola affectus*) of St. Bernard which also influenced St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure, St. Theresa of Jesus, and St. Francis de Sales.

explains the content of these two loves: *Affective love is a sort of overflowing of the person who loves into the person beloved or, indeed, a feeling of complacency or tenderness for the object loved, such as a father has for his child. Effective love consists in doing those things which the person beloved commands or desires.*<sup>28</sup> Affective love enables one to be passionate and moved by the plight of the other. He compares this love to that of a child who is unable to separate from his/her mother and who cries out the moment this separation occurs.<sup>29</sup> Thus, *affective love is the tender element of love.*<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, effective love consists of the concrete practice of charitable works, especially on behalf of the poor — works that are undertaken with courage, joy fidelity and love.<sup>31</sup>

Vincent maintains that affective and effective love are two complementary characteristics of love. In order to develop mercy, the first step should be the compassionate assimilation of the suffering of another. The affective union with the person in need enables people to experience in their own flesh the evil that another suffers. Affective love gives a certain tenderness to the details of any assistance — sympathy and empathy become the exquisite characteristics of daily service. Remember that in 17<sup>th</sup> century France there was great poverty and ignorance and many Christians had become *accustomed* to seeing suffering. Affective love enables one to be pained by the suffering of another and thus one can no longer remain a passive spectator.

On the other hand, effective love leads one to decide to work on behalf of the poor. Effective love accomplishes what affective love discovers. Such love acts creatively to guarantee that within the Church the poor are illustrious citizens. In this way effective love leads to concrete solutions to the evils that afflict the world of the poor. Viewing these two facets of love, effective love is primary in Vincentian ethics. Though affective love might be somewhat defective, those who practice effective love live charity to a higher

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<sup>28</sup> SV XI, 43; Conference to the Missionaries, "On the Love of God," [undated]. On another occasion he describes it in this way: *Affective love proceeds from the heart. The person who loves is filled with warmth and affection, is continually aware of the presence of God, finds satisfaction in thinking about Him, and spends her life imperceptibly in such contemplation. Thanks to this love, she does, with no difficulty — and even with pleasure — the most difficult things, and is vigilant and careful concerning anything that can make her pleasing to God; lastly, she basks in his divine love and takes no pleasure in any other thoughts* (SV IX, 475; English edition IX, 373).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. SV IX, 592-593; English edition IX, 466.

<sup>30</sup> SV IX, 592; English edition IX, 466.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. SV IX, 593; English edition IX, 466.

degree. One who feels much does little for others.<sup>32</sup> In order for charity to have this seat of honor, it should be active. Vincent's teaching about effective love is in accord with his ethics that gives action a privileged position. We should point out here that he returns to the refrain of Theresa: *works are love but good reasons are not*. From this position his teaching about love becomes clear:

*Let us love God, my Brethern, but let us love Him with all our strength and with the sweat of our brow. For very often many acts of love of God, of complacency, of benevolence, and such like interior affections and practices, although very good and very desirable, are yet to be suspected if they do not reach the practice of effective love... there are many... who flatter themselves by the warmth of their imagination; they rest content with the sweet discourses they have with God in prayer; they even speak to Him as though they were angels. But apart from this, should there be question of working for God, of suffering, of self-denial, of instructing the poor, of going out to seek the lost sheep, of loving to be in want, of accepting illness or disgrace, alas! They are no longer to be found; their courage fails them.*<sup>33</sup>

Even though there might be periods of dryness when the affective matrix of love becomes clouded, this is no reason to abandon or put aside effective service and prayer. Beyond this crisis Vincentian morality indicates that affective and effective love should be joined together and are mutually necessary and complementary. Normally affective love is the first to arise but this is benevolence that becomes beneficial when love becomes effective. Affective love accompanies the development process of action and gives it a note of tenderness and warmth. In fact, service without affection can often become resentful and humbling to the recipients of charity. Whoever unites these two faces of love will love with tenderness, consistency and resoluteness. Indeed, a sign of having grown in charity is shown in our ability to live with both languages

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<sup>32</sup> With great clarity Vincent explains: *Some poor Sisters become discouraged. They hear that a certain Sister is so fervent, makes her prayer well, and has a deep love of God. They experience none of that; they think all is lost, they don't belong in the Company because they're not doing what the others are doing, and that it's better for them to leave, since they are there without the love of God. Now that's a mistake, dear Sisters. If you're living your vocation, you can be sure that you love God and that you love Him incomparably more perfectly than those who feel this love deeply but don't do what you do* (SV IX, 477; English edition IX, 374-375).

<sup>33</sup> SV XI, 45; Conference to the Missionaries, "On the Love of God," [undated].



of love.<sup>34</sup> Affective and effective love are gifts of God because God changes desire into reality and service into an expression of tenderness.<sup>35</sup> In order to make these two faces of love more graphic Vincent utilizes an image that is taken from family life: a father has two sons, one older and one younger. With the younger son the father has a very tender and good relationship but he is more demanding with the elder son who does the things that the father desires. At the hour of drawing up his will, the father gave the greater part of his goods to the older son. In other words, the father loved the younger son with a sensitive and tender love but his love for his older son is more effective.<sup>36</sup>

Affective and effective love express our handing over of ourselves to God and to our sisters and brothers. St. Vincent, who continually recommended that his community live this affective and effective love, wanted the confreres to avoid all harshness in their relations with one another and in their relations with people outside the community. He proposed a lively affectivity, not as a search for sensuality, nor as some compensatory necessity, but rather as a way of living life as a gift. He sets forth a life of commitment to Christ and to the most poor, fulfilling our existence as we make our lives a life of love. He invites mothers and fathers to share affective and effective love with the infirm, prisoners, abandoned children, the hungry — many of whom never had a true family experience. For St. Vincent affective love is so strong that it invites us to become fond of the poor. In this way, our Founder becomes the balanced mentor of an ethics full of goodness, tenderness, and strength. In addition, as he unites affective love with effective love, he proposes a pastoral ministry of love which was a break with the rigidity that was so prevalent in the Church of his time.

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<sup>34</sup> St. Vincent writes Brother Jean Barreau, Consul in Algiers who is a prisoner at the hands of Muslims because of a debt that he contracted in an attempt to rescue others who were also prisoners. This text is an example of joining effective love with affective love: *I think I wrote to you about how deeply grieved I have been by the evils you have suffered; that feeling is renewed within me every time I reflect on them. Although you cannot imagine how much I have been moved by this, you can, nevertheless, be sure that it touches me to the quick because, bearing you in my heart as I do, your sufferings can only be mine as well. Now for some reason, I am beginning to worry about your affairs, since they are among our most important ones. I have had someone speak to M. de Brienne about them. I have discussed them several times with the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and the other Ladies of Charity because they are the only persons to whom I can turn* (SV VI, 460-461; English edition VI, 479).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. SV VI, 550; English edition VI, 464-466.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. SV IX, 475-476; English edition IX, 373-374.

### Those responsible for charitable action

Benedict XVI points out that the subject of charitable action is the whole Church. In his encyclical he stresses charitable ecclesial action and places the bishop in a position of priority. He underlines the fact that bishops should be welcoming and merciful toward the poor (DCE 32). He then continues to affirm a series of qualities that should be possessed by those who collaborate in these charitable works. 1) They should be guided by a faith that acts in love. 2) They should love men and women with the love of Jesus Christ. 3) They should serve with humility. This virtue will prevent two temptations; namely, feeling superior to the one served and the presumption that single-handedly one has to better the world, which in the long terms leads to discouragement. 4) They should be people of prayer — to be holy is not opposed to committing oneself to the struggle against misery. In fact, people should achieve such confidence in prayer that they feel comfortable placing before God the question: Why does God not act more visibly in history on behalf of those who are massacred or live on the margins of society? 5) They should possess a hope that makes them patiently active (DCE 33-39).

The encyclical makes reference to the particular charity that the bishops ought to have in relation to the poor. We are able to delve more deeply into this as we look at some of the many reflections that St. Vincent made on this theme. St. Vincent has a very high opinion of the bishop. He elaborated these ideas ideologically and was guided in this reflection by his reading of the early Fathers of the Church, the teachings of the Council of Trent and the theology of the School of Bérulle, which viewed the priestly state as a most excellent way of following God. Thus he writes to his friend Louis Abelly, the Vicar-General of Bayonne and praises his bishop:

*... how astonished those people are, in my opinion, to see their prelate living like a real bishop... what can we not hope for from a prelate who has so well regulated his own life and that of his servants; who has given so many corporal and spiritual alms to his diocese; who takes care of poor prisoners; who is blessed with the conversion of heretics.<sup>37</sup>*

He also writes to a bishop who was recently installed in a diocese that had great need of him. In his greeting he included a vade mecum of how a prelate should be virtuous:

*Christ, who offered Himself as surety for the poor, has already superabundantly responded to my wishes by choosing for the episcopate a Prelate who wishes to make himself useful, knows*

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<sup>37</sup> SV II, 2-3; English edition II, 4.



*how to govern, is remarkable for his prudence and the integrity of his character, and promises to be a worthy successor of saints. How great are my joy and happiness at seeing that God has directed so well the course of events that, having made you grow from virtue to virtue, He now leads you from honor to honor.... May He who has set you apart to instruct His people in salvation maintain your flock in doing good and preserve your Church without stain or wrinkle under your guidance.<sup>38</sup>*

When speaking about the attitudes of the servant, Benedict XVI emphasized humility. This virtue is highly developed in Vincentian morality and spirituality. The question is: how can we live humble lives today? Following St. Vincent, we believe that this virtue ought to be verified in daily life. To make humility real we can provide some insights that hopefully will show the reality of humility and in this way charity will not fade. One way to make all of this concrete is to avoid comparisons. Pride and selfishness make us rejoice to see the evil in others; for example, selfish people might feel satisfied because they possess many things, yet find no rest as long as they see someone else who possesses more. On the other hand, humble people are able to concentrate on the goods that others possess as well as on their own goods and are able to be grateful for both. Also humble people are able to put things aside because they truly see these things as meaningless. They do not live to be seen by others, nor are they concerned about appearances and do not need to have others speak well of them — they are not slaves of public opinion. They flee from a life of self-sufficiency and are able to accept criticism —

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<sup>38</sup> When speaking about charity, St. Vincent makes a special reference to the Bishop of Geneva. He sees Francis de Sales as the best example of charity. He says: *I had the happiness of speaking with the late Bishop of Geneva several times when he was alive. He was so good that God's goodness was clearly visible in his own* (SV III, 493; English edition III, 490). He indicates that the Bishop of Geneva was characterized by a great love of God that led him to combat sin and promote the Kingdom of God. He cared for all those who drew near to him and shared his possessions with those in need. His gentle charity is worthy of imitation by those people who are dedicated to charitable action. In doing so, they will avoid losing affectivity in their work. He invites people to follow the example of St. Francis de Sales who was gentle — who avoided anger, shouting and offending others. In this context, Vincent liked to describe some of his many charitable examples: *Our Blessed Father the Bishop of Geneva, has given us a wonderful example of this virtue. One evening a high-ranking person called on him and stayed into the night. His servants forgot to bring any candles, as they should have done. What do you think he said to them? He didn't reproach them for their fault, nor did he scold them; he simply said: "Well, boys, we could have used a bit of a candle." Act like that, Sisters and don't get into the habit of snapping at one another.... And don't use unbecoming language, such as, "You're annoying and obstinate," or the like* (SV IX, 159; English edition IX, 127-128).

self-criticism as well as criticism from others. They avoid moving through life as though they have no need for repentance. Ethical blindness is often loved and self-nourishing in people who lack humility. In other words, to work humbly from the perspective of personalism is another way of accepting the truth. It means that we accept the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven is composed of sinners who have been forgiven.

With regard to the poor, humility enables us to opt with integrity on their behalf. This implies choosing services that are frequently not desired by many people: little remuneration, hidden, no recognition, in vulgar places, no shining lights. To opt for the poor is to be in those places where there is no power — to dwell on the margins of society where there is risk and conflict. Vincentian humility adds something more to our relationships with those persons who are excluded: physical closeness and a loving presence. Humility allows us to be among the poor with respect and tenderness. We are able to communicate attitudes of joy and hope to a world where there are far too many tears. To live with the poor and seek solutions to problems with them enables us to avoid the temptation of obtaining followers who can distract us from the struggle for justice in the world of those who have been excluded.

Humility ought to lead us to an honest and courageous revision of our works and foment attitudes of mobility, flexibility and sincerity. We ought to review the quality of service — indeed we ought to prefer changes in style over changes in place. All of this should be done with the calm and humble acceptance of personal, community and provincial limitations.

Humility points out to us that we not only teach others but that we ought to allow others to instruct us. The poor will preach to us in a persuasive way if we allow them to do so. Therefore it is healthy to learn from the many values of the poor — one of which is gratitude. We ought to be grateful not only for extraordinary events but, more importantly, we should be grateful for life itself. We ought to value life as a gift that leads us to a gratitude that pervades every dimension of our life. This is the basis for celebration and we see how the humble show their gratitude through celebration. Here the constant, humble gratitude of Vincent de Paul is most enlightening.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> We mention here, as an example, his gratitude to Adrien Le Bon, a member of the Congregation of St. Victor (the Regular Canons of St. Augustine) and the former prior of Saint-Lazare. He donated this magnificent house of Saint-Lazare to St. Vincent and the Congregation of the Mission. Le Bon passed the rest of his life as a guest in the house of Saint-Lazare. Vincent always treated Adrien with the greatest tenderness and deference. He not only cared for him while at Saint-Lazare, but also when he traveled to other parts of France. He was able to find lodging in any house of the Congregation.

In the missionary endeavor, humility is lived in cultural openness, respect for that which is distinct and the joyful discovery of the truths and values of others. It also means that we accept the theological contributions of emerging nations. Humility allows the missionary to evangelize and be evangelized. — it allows the missionary to preach the Word of God revealed in Scripture and not his/her own word.

*Deus Caritas Est* reminds us that love is possible and that the Christian is able to practice charity because men and women are created to love and because God has gifted them with his love — charity. True faith leads us to live in love (DCE 39). Therefore, we can conclude that in the midst of a culture based on exclusion, xenophobia (more or less covered over), and violence reinforced with religious motives, charity proposes a love without frontiers, a love that seeks to resolve the root causes of problems. Therefore, charity, with its own creativeness, invites our inventive abilities to include those living on the margins into our celebration of life. Such creativity will lead us to the following steps: to recreate our Vincentian tradition and to seek new entrances into the future. At a time when there is a crisis of alternatives, when old forms of domination are repeated, charity ought to impel us to a new respect for the person and the community. In an era when evil is too often imitated, love should lead us to challenge this distorted reality in a more radical way than is presently operative. Before transforming structures, we, as Vincentians, ought to first allow the pain of the suffering ones to penetrate our hearts. Thus as their path of hardship becomes our path, we can recommit ourselves to restoring their lost dignity.

(CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M., translator)

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When Le Bon passed through Montmirail and Richelieu, Vincent asked the communities to provide for him: *Vincent de Paul asks Guillaume Delville to feed and lodge free of charge in his house Adrien Le Bon, former Prior of Saint-Lazare, who has to go to Montmirail, and even to treat him as if he were the master of the property and persons* (SV II, 553; English edition II, 604. Cf. SV II, 485; English edition II, 534). Furthermore, St. Vincent points out that we should not forget our benefactors even if they fall into disgrace. In those moments we ought to help them: *what a happiness to become impoverished in order to oblige someone who has been our benefactor* (SV V, 179; English edition V, 181). Vincent also congratulates a superior who returned money to a benefactor who was experiencing some difficult moments: *if we are truly grateful for the acts of charity that have been done for us, we will always be ready to return willingly the goods our benefactors have given us, if it is in our power* (SV VIII, 18-19; English edition VIII, 24).

# The Encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, and its African Reception

by Yosief Zeracristos, C.M.

*Vice-Province of Saint Justin de Jacobis*

## Premise

We all know who John Paul II was and we know of his impact and influence on the faith journey of so many people: religious and laity, believers or not alike. He was a challenging figure, a very attractive and lovable father, a father to all men and women and, especially, a father and leader for youth.

Since his election on 19 April 2005, many individuals and groups have been asking what the papacy of Pope Benedict XVI will look like. What will it mean to many of us, as individuals and groups? What influence and impact will this very well-known, brilliant theologian, timid, and humble man of God, Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, have on our Church and the worldwide society? These were the anxieties of many people, I guess. Most of these anxieties were set against the backdrop of the legacy of Pope John Paul II. If I could interpret the sentiments of many Africans, when all the ceremonies were over, millions of Africans were expecting a black Pope to appear on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. But it did not happen simply because the time is not yet ripe or it is not yet God's will, though I have to say that many Africans were not disappointed by the election of Benedict XVI, but rather considered it as providential (God's Providence). Far from being subjected to human intrigues at all, what comes from God is always for the good of the Church and our society.

## **I. African hopes and expectations from the Papacy of Benedict XVI<sup>1</sup>**

What are the expectations of us Africans from the papacy of Benedict XVI? And what does the first Encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI have to do with our hopes and expectations? How is this clear, simple and theologically profound Encyclical Letter understood?

First of all, let me clarify that the real concern or challenge is not what the papacy of Benedict XVI will do for our continent, it is rather how the leadership of the Catholic Church in Africa can re-position itself so as to create the necessary conditions for a paradigm shift on all fronts in Africa. We all remember that when John Paul II came to the See of St. Peter, Rome symbolically brought down the Berlin Wall. After so many years of conflict and divisiveness, communism and the extreme apartheid, thanks to God, came to an end.

Standard Africans and good Christians dream, even with open eyes, of seeing the following curses eradicated from this beloved continent: man-made poverty caused principally by situations of war, the partial or total dependence on others (or the problem of self-reliance), dictatorship, corruption, traditional debt, tribal conflicts, disrespect for human life and sexual discrimination (especially against women), etc. Africa needs to inculturate Christian values in order to transform her own. To do so, it needs the strong moral voices of her own sons and daughters joined to that of the new Pope Benedict XVI.

On the other hand, the Church of Africa needs a strong, provocative moral voice, inspiration and support from the new Pope in order to: strengthen and inculturate properly her faith in Christ; modify the African culture through the person of Christ; and have a well-formed clergy with very solid moral behaviour and life-witness. What our Church needs is, I think, to have a clear conscience and a radical acceptance of Christ and his teaching. In many cases we can see that it is not the Christian faith that guides our moral behaviour but the tradition and customs of our ancestors. Therefore, the Church of Africa and especially her clergy need to define clearly their vocation and Christian identity and their lifestyle as Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> Though I myself am an African, it is hard to speak for all Africans. After all, Africa is neither a village, nor a country, but a very huge continent with a variety of hopes and expectations. Therefore, the reader of this article should be aware of this limitation. I am an Eritrean Vincentian and, in speaking about my fellow Africans, I do not have any pretension, but I simply put my personal thoughts here and not as a representative of many fellow Africans.

Radical fellowship with Jesus, hence, is necessary for the Church of Africa, without any shadows in regard to the life of faith, celibacy or tribalism (a very narrow and very limited way of seeing things). The African Church and its clergy need to struggle against these limitations, trying to overcome them, with the help of God, and the support voiced by the vicar of Christ, Benedict XVI.

## II. Does *Deus Caritas Est* respond to the expectations and challenges of the Church in Africa?

Pope Benedict XVI seeks to remind us that God is Love, as John the Evangelist did. John presents God as Love to a world of conflicts; so too does the Holy Father. Therefore I would say that the Pope has chosen a significant title at the heart of our Christian faith: *God is Love*. He believes that the strongest revolution is to believe in the Love-Power of God, as the apostles did. If we believe in Love, then, yes, it is already an answer to our questions and we definitely can meet our challenges. As a result, I personally have a sharp impression that this Encyclical Letter is a perfect response to all our expectations. The second part of this Encyclical Letter deals with *effective love*. It is a reminder and a clear indication of the path that the worldwide Catholic Church should take. "*God is Love*," the Church is *God's family* and is, therefore, *communion in love*. St Augustine put it clearly: "*If you see charity, you see the Trinity*" (cf., DCE, 19). Love and charity to all, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, says the Pope, but also to our brothers in faith (Gal 6:10). Every individual member of the faithful and the entire ecclesial community at every level have the responsibility to love their neighbour. In the footsteps of St. Vincent, the Holy Father, affirms that *love needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community*. The Pope rightly reminds us, that the very nature of the Church is in her being *koinonia*, *kerygma/liturgia* and *diakonia*.

*The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter "by chance" (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be... (DCE, 25).*

This Encyclical Letter encourages us, as it does the Universal Catholic Church, to be committed to the work of justice:

*... commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not*

*directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run (DCE, 29).*

The Pope warns that Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. The second part of the Encyclical Letter deals with different aspects that I consider challenges to the way we handle charitable works. It is obviously not addressed particularly or directly to the African Church, but, perhaps much more than any other Church, challenges us indeed. For the Holy Father, *true love*, based on Paul's Hymn of Charity/Love in 1 Corinthians 13, which he himself considers a synthesis of his Encyclical Letter, transforms individuals and society alike. If Africans believe in God who is Love and act properly, there will be no more:

- poverty caused by situations of war, unjust social order and disrespect of life;
- abuses or misuses of authority or dictatorship, the real disease of so many African nations, the leaders of which are blind for power and money;
- corruption, poor self-love (*amor propre*);
- tribal conflicts and discrimination;
- sexual abuse or discrimination, especially against women, and so many other issues.

*Deus Caritas Est* is also a challenge to the Church of Africa to be:

- *transparent and efficient*: The Pope strongly appealed for transparency and efficiency in charitable activities. He reminded us to serve the poor faithfully, as Vincent would have said to us today, as Vincentian Family;
- *moved by Christian love and service to challenge paganism*: The Holy Father mentions Julian the Apostate to tell us a very simple truth: true Christian love and service are always challenges to the secular or pagan world and are the best means of evangelization. The African Church, as the Universal one, is called to maintain a balance between activism and discouragement in face of the difficult task to accomplish, and the life of prayer. The very important message of the Holy Father seems to say: *Beloved faithful and clergy of Africa, remain in love, for love and service of Christ are your true vocation!*



Everybody knows how our Africa is filled with immense problems to the extent that it is not easy to list them all. But the Pope gives a key to our challenges: **Love**. *"The Love of Christ urges us on"* (2 Cor 5:14). We all know that love never fails. Therefore, as the Pope tell us, we need to believe seriously and be in touch always with the Loving God and pray fervently as Mary the Mother of God did.



# *Deus Caritas Est* in Latin America

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## Introduction

Concerning the encyclical *Deus Caritas est* of Pope Benedict XVI, I would like to pull together some considerations destined to deepen Vincentian spirituality in Latin America. This encyclical was published at Christmas 2005, as a way of offering a Christmas greeting to the faithful of the entire world, and its theme was doubtless linked to public opinion concerning the problems of the sexual conduct of the clergy.

Our purpose, therefore, is to nourish the Vincentian family, for it to be filled with that love that moved Saint Vincent toward the poor of his time, like a fire flaming and burning during his entire life. I will then divide my reflection into two parts. In the first, I will comment on the content of the encyclical; in the second, I will compare the pope's discourse with the option for the poor in Saint Vincent and in Latin America.

This first letter of Benedict XVI may be classified as a reflection of Christian ethics or a chapter of moral theology. The chosen theme develops out of the renewal of Catholic moral teaching begun by Father Bernard Häring,<sup>1</sup> when he wrote, even before the Council, the first version of his extensive work of moral theology, *The Law of Christ*. This was the first attempt to overcome the casuistic moral teaching centered on the conception of sin, with its profoundly pessimistic vision about earthly realities. In opposition to casuistry and scholastic moral theology, Häring proposed a morality centered on faith and in the love of Christ. He recovered foundations in the Bible and tradition for his reflection on a renewed Christian ethics, freeing it from the dichotomies of the Aristotelian-Thomistic method.

This moral theologian inspired Father Marciano Vidal<sup>2</sup> to draw up his moral theology of "attitudes" that contributed so greatly to the reflection of seminaries and religious institutions in Latin America. It was because of the influence of the Council and of Bernard Häring

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<sup>1</sup> BERNARD HÄRING, *The Law of Christ*, 3 vols., Westminster, Md, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> MARCIANO VIDAL, *Moral de atitudes, ética da pessoa*, volume II, translated from the 5<sup>th</sup> Spanish ed., Aparecida, 1988.

that a group of Spanish moralists, Aspitarte, Elizari Bastera and Rincón Orduña,<sup>3</sup> confronted moral theology as Christian praxis, coming out of an encounter with the faith that was developing in Latin America as an articulation between word and life, theory and practice, action and reflection.

But it was in Latin America itself that various moral theologians blossomed, such as Jaime Snoeck, Bernardino Leers, Antônio Moser, Márcio Fabri dos Anjos, Francisco Moreno Rejón, Roque Junges and an entire group of professors of moral theology, including our former superior general Robert Maloney, who also worked with moral theology in our seminaries in Panama.

### God is Love

The Second Vatican Council (1961-1965) did not treat specifically of moral theology. Nevertheless, it did open some horizons to promote a renewal of all Christian moral teaching. Häring himself revised his work in the spirit and the mentality of the council, giving it a new title: *Free and Faithful in Christ*.<sup>4</sup> In every perspective where a renewal of moral theology is found, we find a bright inspiration in Häring's thought. As a professional theologian, Benedict XVI, certainly knew as few others did the thought of Father Häring. What was the law of Christ? It was the law of love. To become a disciple of Jesus Christ is to follow the law of love, since Christ acted as a teacher of the gratuitous love of God. The love of God is a free gift; it is grace. This love is proclaimed by the divine teacher as the greatest of all virtues, the only one that remains to the end.

Pope Benedict XVI turned again to Saint John, the evangelist who speaks the best of love and who articulated the love of God with human love: "It may be said that only he knows God whom he loves, because God is love."<sup>5</sup> With his theology Saint Paul also contributed by identifying love with the gratuity of the gift of God. We are liberated by him through grace; we live now under the rule of grace, which justified us and purified us before God. The law kills, the spirit gives life; the reign of the law is finished, and now we live under the rule of the new law, the law of love. It is love which is going to save

<sup>3</sup> R. LOPEZ ASPITARTE - F.J. ELIZARI BASTERA - R. RINCÓN ORDUÑA, *Práxis cristã, II: Opção pela vida e pelo amor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, translated by Álvaro Cunha, São Paulo, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> BERNARD HÄRING, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, 3 vols., New York, 1978-1982.

<sup>5</sup> I John, 2:3-5; 4:7-16.

us. We will be judged, according to Saint Matthew, by the principle and criterion of love.<sup>6</sup>

This positive horizon, opened by Häring, broadened the understanding of the Christian life as a fundamental option for love, and the following of Jesus Christ became the way of Christian praxis, like ethics and moral theology. Previously, Catholic moral teaching was more like scholastic philosophy and canon law than scripture and tradition. Now, it is better identified with the Word of God, the preaching of the Fathers and Christian spirituality. The pope clearly affirms that the love of God gives meaning to human love and transforms it in the fundamental option of the Christian. Deepening the reflection on love, he proposes a deepening of the meaning of Christian life. To elaborate a moral discourse based on love is to seek and construct the meaning of life.

Then in the first paragraphs, the pope defines the method that he will follow in the development of his letter. He sees it divided into two distinct parts. The first is a theoretical speculation on love in its three dimensions: eros, philia and agape.<sup>7</sup> Here he makes a philosophical, anthropological and theological speculation on Christian love, making use of these categories of Greek philosophy as they were taken up into the revelation of the Gospel and the epistles of Saint John the Evangelist.

In the second part, he follows the road of moral teaching, that is, of Christian ethics as the practice of the faith. He identifies this practice with the concept of love-charity and reduces every expression of love to acts of charity and the assistance of the poor. He rejects any practice of love that might signify the search for transformation of structures. This has great relevance for us, since in Latin America the method of reflecting and the new concept of faith and love are determinative for an understanding of what happens in the Latin-American Church.

We could classify the first part as speculative theology about the concept of love and about love as a theological virtue. He discusses erotic love and refers to an accusation of Nietzsche against the Catholic Church, who believed it to be contaminated by a deadly poison, the concupiscence of eros. However, despite everything, eros has resisted and survived. Nietzsche accused the Church of "satanizing" one divine dimension of love, making into sin every

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<sup>6</sup> Rom 2:12-24; 5:1-21; 7:1-6.

<sup>7</sup> Jaime Snoeck in his book *Ensaio de ética sexual* uses the same Greek categories and the Gospel of Saint John, but gives another understanding of human love: an evolution of matrimonial love, from the beginning of falling in love to the maturity of life together. It is a process of growth and maturation.

manifestation of happiness, desire and joy in sexual practice. The pope justifies himself and justifies the interpretation of the Church by arguing that sex reduced to hedonism dehumanizes the person through suffering. For this reason, a Christian has to remain vigilant and active to free love from this poison of erotic concupiscence. Father Jaime Snoeck, a moralist of the Redemptorist community, Dutch but rooted in Brazil, also elaborated his sexual ethics on the basis of these three categories of love. His perspective, however, is one of a process of integration and maturation of the love of eros, philia and agape, culminating in the integration and realization of conjugal love. Agape signifies the full communion of the love of eros and philia in the dialogue of friendship, happiness, joy, union and full communion.

In Latin America, we also agree that eros was contaminated by a poison which made sexuality banal and reduced it to hedonism. But for us, this poison is clearly identified: it deals with consumerism and the ideology of capitalism which associated sexuality with consumption and transformed it into a product of this same consumption. It reduced the human person to the order of means, and made of the person a way of making more money.<sup>8</sup> "God tempts no one; we are tempted only by our own concupiscence,"<sup>9</sup> the apostle affirms. There is truly a risk of separating ourselves from the plan of God and of seeking pleasure for its own sake, changing it into an end in itself.

The second part of the encyclical seeks to prove that the Church has always lived this law of love, identified with the practice of charity. To justify this affirmation, the encyclical refers to various institutions of charity and brings forth the examples of the saints who ennobled themselves through the exercise of Christian charity. Then he makes an excursus on the social teaching of the Church, emphasizing its contribution to the orientation of the State toward charity as social justice, to the reconciliation of conflicts and to relations between capital and labor, always in view of the building of peace. Charity always seeks to construct peace and harmony, contrary to the ideologies that manipulate the human person, exacerbate conflicts, preach violence and nurture hatred. At this point he directly analyzes the Marxist ideology, although Marxism no longer represents any threat to the world. Today's threat is

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<sup>8</sup> In his book, *O enigma da esfinge; uma análise da sexualidade humana* (Petrópolis, 2003), Brother ANTÔNIO MOSER, analyzes sexuality beginning with the denunciations in the press of pedophilia charges against the clergy of the Catholic Church.

<sup>9</sup> James 1:12-15.

neo-liberalism and economic globalization, which represents the renewed phase of capitalist totalitarianism.

In this second part, there is a veiled reaffirmation of the critiques formulated against Liberation Theology when he was prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is not improper to identify in this part the veiled reference to the Liberation Theology of Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

In this perspective, the encyclical affirms the sacred value of the human person against the Marxist teachings that accuse the Church of mere assistance of the poor, and whose consequence is the retarding of revolutionary transformation.

Against this utilitarian and pragmatic vision, which transforms the human person into an instrument and means of hastening the revolution, he puts the gratuity of the love of God concretized in the practice of charity. The objective of the action of the Church should be to construct the Kingdom of God in the direction of eschatology and not to identify it with the transformation of the structures of this world. In this sense, the encyclical approaches the position of the two documents<sup>11</sup> sent to the episcopal conferences of Latin America in the decade of the eighties, correcting certain aspects of Liberation Theology, where there was an opposition between the urgency of sharing bread and the need of preaching the word.

In this second part, he recalls also that love harmonizes and integrates the living out of the theological and cardinal virtues, which put us in communion with God and allows us to be always working toward a conversion to God. It becomes a path for directing ourselves in our mind and heart toward God.<sup>12</sup>

In synthesis, the encyclical begins with fundamental moral theology by returning to various concepts to elaborate a theory of love. It speaks of Christian love as that which gives meaning to human love, integrating sexuality with the sacrament of marriage and in the building of the family. It presents, therefore, themes of the moral teaching of sexuality, marriage and family. He passes from moral speculation to Christian ethics as the practice of love,

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<sup>10</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Libertatis Conscientiae," Instruction on Christian freedom and liberation, 1987. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter on the Mission of the Church and the Theology of Liberation* (to the Episcopal Conference of Brazil), 1987. In this letter, the pope makes some remarks on the dangers of the Theology of Liberation but affirms that the Theology of Liberation is not only opportune but necessary.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>12</sup> In this part he is using concepts of virtues that are integrated into religious moral teaching, but it is a chapter based on Greek philosophy and faith incorporated into Catholic moral teaching.

characterized by the concept of charity as he integrates in his discourse a reflection on the morality of the virtues. He recalls the teaching of his predecessors in the composition of the social teaching of the Church and refers as well to the compendium drawn up by the Commission Justice and Peace launched in Brazil in June 2005, by Edições Paulinas with the presence of Cardinal Ráfaele Bertoni, president of that commission.

### **With Christ in the poor**

The encyclical provokes a reflection on the Vincentian charism and spirituality, and we are going to identify, for Latin America, a common option. Just as in Saint Vincent, love is not a conceptual abstraction. Rather, it is a matter of concrete love, incarnate love with shape and form, love for the poor as the incarnation of the love of Jesus Christ as found in the Gospel.

In Saint Vincent, love for the poor is not a preferential option; it is, first and foremost, the founding decision of the Christian life. This perception became the horizon of the meaning of all his spirituality and inspired all his work. This love of God, incarnate in the love for the poor, became not only the subject of his conferences, colloquies, letters and theological discourses, but it also became concretized in works and associations moved by the fuel of charity, with a view to eliminate misery and poverty in the France of his time.

It was a spirituality centered on the Incarnate Word, but with an insistence that the Word became flesh by means of the poor and for the poor. To become a disciple, a follower, of Jesus Christ meant for Saint Vincent to take up the goal of the defense and care of the poor. It was not a contemplative love, much less a speculative love, but on the contrary was concrete, active, participative, efficient and efficacious.<sup>13</sup>

Some authors classify Saint Vincent as a contemplative in action, an active-contemplative. The poor, in his vocabulary, have a sacred character and are an absolute value, because the poor are the sacrament of the Absolute, of God. The poor then pertain to the order of ends and cannot be reduced to means or an instrument. The option of the poor in the thought of Saint Vincent is a condition of salvation. Not to love the poor, to ignore them and, even worse, to despise them is to run the risk of losing one's salvation. All congregations have some reference to the poor, but what is different for us is that we were founded only for the poor. The image that he gave us of the poor as the sign of Christ has become emblematic:

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<sup>13</sup> GETÚLIO MOTA GROSSI, *Um místico da missão, Vicente de Paulo*, Contagem, 2001.

"When you look with anxiety on a poor man who is dirty and ugly, you should turn the medal around and there you will find Christ, your brother."

In the conference during which he made this affirmation, he insisted on it and repeated: the poor alone! the poor alone! the poor alone! To justify this decision, in another passage, he presents Jesus Christ in the Gospel questioning his hearers: Why did the divine master come into the world? To help the poor. Emphasizing his discourse, he formulated other questions about the mission of Jesus in the world, and the answer was always the same: to help the poor, to help the poor, to help the poor.

In Saint Vincent, the love for the poor has an inclusive precedence above the worship of the celebration of the Eucharist. "If a confrere goes to celebrate a Mass and a poor person knocks at the door to ask for some help, he should leave the altar and go to assist the poor person. This is to leave God for God."<sup>14</sup> Theologically, this is a daring and revolutionary affirmation.

Father Vincent probably had in mind the parable of the Good Samaritan. A priest passed by and a Levite, two persons chosen intentionally by Jesus, since, as their function, they had a mission to help the poor man who had been beaten and wounded. Nevertheless, perhaps because they were in a hurry or were perhaps late for the worship in the temple or in some synagogue, for the sake of the worship of God they did not give any aid to the poor wounded man, and they passed him by. They did not remember the warning of the prophet: "It is mercy that I desire, not sacrifices."<sup>15</sup> They were acting, however as if the warning were inverted: "It is sacrifices that I desire, not mercy." Jesus was censuring religion, worship and interpretation of the scriptures by the scribes, Pharisees and teachers of the law. The neighbor is not just somebody at our side but is above all the handicapped, the ruined, the beaten and wounded; he or she is the one who lacks help.

Vincentian spirituality is so comprehensive that various congregations and lay associations were born with at least some aspect of his discourse and the practice in his work, particularly his love for the poor. By way of illustration, I will simply recall two examples. When Antoine Frédéric Ozanam was questioned by professional colleagues, professors and students of history, about why Catholics were doing nothing to transform the reality of France in the nineteenth century, he sought in Saint Vincent the way to transform the conferences of history into an instrument of action.

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<sup>14</sup> *Idem*. Conference of Saint Vincent on the care and attention that the confreres should give to the poor.

<sup>15</sup> Mt 9:13; 12:7.



Catholics had kept discussing the social, political and economic situation principally in Paris, but were doing nothing about it.<sup>16</sup>

The French revolution had already had a violent reaction against the Church and the monarchy. Historians affirm that the revolution took place against throne and altar, since the poor and those living in misery had been abandoned by the State and by the Church. "Watch out for these poor folk," the Catholic hierarchy warned.

Blessed Ozanam was impressed by the direction that Saint Vincent had given to the Confraternities of Charity, a lay organization established to help the poor. He immersed himself, then, in this work and in this perception of the charitable activity of Saint Vincent, and he changed the name of the conferences of history into the Vincentian conferences, with the social goal of having their members go out to encounter the poor and to contribute to the social transformation of France. All we have to do is to read the newspaper articles, the letters and the conferences of Blessed Ozanam to conclude that the Vincentian conferences were of an eminently social character.<sup>17</sup>

With this, the conferences became strong leaven in the dough and transcended both time and space to move beyond borders, principally into Latin America. In recent times, they have needed a refoundation to recover the original spirit of their founder.

In this case, Ozanam was impressed by the organization destined to the practice of charity: lay persons going out to encounter the poor, to help them believe that God loves them, that God is love. Love for God was not a conceptual abstract, but was and continues to be enfolded in the sign and testimony of the members of the confraternities, Vincentian brothers and sisters, when they visit the poor in their shanties, houses, asylums, shelters, prisons and nurseries.<sup>18</sup>

A second example explores another side of the love for the poor lived and preached by Saint Vincent: a Dutch bishop, Johannes Zwijsen, founder of the Brothers of Mercy. This prelate was impressed by the preaching of Vincent de Paul about charity as mercy and compassion. In this sense, much in the preaching of Saint Vincent spoke to him about the virtue of meekness. Goodness, kindness, patience, compassion, recommended to the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, were the incarnation of the mercy and

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<sup>16</sup> JOSÉ TOBIAS ZICO, *Antônio Frederico Ozanam e a missão do leigo na igreja*, Belo Horizonte, 1971; complete works of Frederic Ozanam, 11 volumes; BONNARD, *Frédéric Ozanam d'après sa correspondance*, Paris, 1912; *Ozanam, o livro do centenário*, Rio de Janeiro, 1913.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*.



compassion of Jesus. With Saint Vincent he learned the meaning of: "It is mercy I desire, not sacrifices."<sup>19</sup>

The Vincentian spirit inspired Bishop Zwislen to found a lay congregation with the charism of the mercy and compassion of God toward the poor. For this reason, he called them the Brothers of Mercy and today its members are part of the large Vincentian family.

It is not enough simply to care for the poor; what is needed is to treat them with mercy and compassion. In Brazil, Brother Henrique Cristiano published an exhaustive study on the movement of mercy, including a chapter on mercy and compassion in Vincentian spirituality based on a detailed study of the work of Pierre Coste.<sup>20</sup>

### Those whom Christ prefers in Latin America

The Second Vatican Council created the possibility of a social pastoral service rooted in the continental and regional realities of Latin America. The conferences held by CELAM in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, and in Puebla, Mexico, in 1978, opened the horizons of the Church to the need for a pastoral ministry that preaches and contributes to the transformation of the reality of poverty and misery in this colonized and suffering continent.

In that moment there was growing in all the nations of this continent a great anxiety for freedom from the social, political and economic structures which they feared would keep us dependent on the United States and Europe. Our countries had freed themselves from slavery and the domination of the motherlands of Spain and Portugal, but they were falling under the dominion of capitalist imperialism. This domination was becoming worse at that time with the plan of the United States to place all these nations under the control of the military trained in the School of the Americas in Panama, under the ideological pretext of saving us from Communism. Among the various denunciations of this project was a book by the American linguist Noam Chomsky, that critiqued North American foreign policy.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Mt 9:13; 12:7.

<sup>20</sup> CELAM, Medellín, Colombia, 1968; CELAM, Puebla, México, 1978. The main points of these conferences: the option for the poor becomes the base for the Theology of Liberation; a pastoral ministry of liberation, base ecclesial communities, understanding of the faith as praxis, which launched the Church directly into the problems of the people. A true conversion took place toward the cause of the poor.

<sup>21</sup> NOAM CHOMSKY, *Counter-revolutionary violence: bloodbaths in fact and propaganda [Banhos de sangue]*, Andover, Mass., 1973, ARCHDIOCESE OF SÃO PAULO, *Brasil nunca mais: um relato para a história*, 20<sup>th</sup> edition, Petrópolis, 1987.

Medellín imparted a new energy to theology, both moral and pastoral, when it began the reflection that had already been maturing in the ISPAC of Rio de Janeiro, led by our former confrere, Prof. Hugo de Vasconcellos Paiva, aided by Prof. Hugo Assman and other collaborators in the process of the updating of the clergy of Brazil.

The analysis of Latin American reality done by the theologian and sociologist Father Joseph Comblin was fundamental in ecclesiological thinking. He held that the people of Latin America were not ignorant in matters of religion. The poor know enough for salvation and are marked by their religiosity and popular Catholicism. The difference between Europe and Latin America was in that, while they were debating about militant atheism, dialectical materialism, secularism and heresies, our problems were poverty, misery, famine and economic domination.

Although in Europe the problem was orthodoxy, faithfulness to doctrine, in Latin America the great problem was orthopraxy, the lack of agreement between faith and life, a dichotomy between action and reflection, a separation between the sacred and the profane. The faith was not accomplishing any transformation as leaven in the dough, nor as light to illuminate the reality and contribute to its transformation. As Brother Bernardino Leers said, the hierarchy was working as if the word in Exodus was: "I have not heard the outcry of my people."

Then the conference at Medellín determined to make a decided option for the poor, to gather its forces in the struggle to transform reality and, in this way, the study and analysis of reality would become a starting point for all theological reflections. The episcopate consecrated the method proposed by Canon (later Cardinal) Cardijn for Catholic Action, which had already produced many young people dedicated to the cause of the people, in the famous classification of youth ministry in A-E-I-O-U (youth that was agrarian, student-led, independent, working, and enrolled in a Catholic university [from its Portuguese initials: *agraria, estudantil, independente, operária, universitária católica*].)

Out of this reflection and method was born Liberation Theology, a pastoral theology of liberation, the Ecclesial Base Communities, biblical clubs, reflection groups, movements of Christian faith and social involvement, bringing together the participation of Christian in the process of transformation of social, political and economic reality.<sup>22</sup> In Latin America, the faith assumed the dimension of the practice of charity. Fr. Francisco Taborda, a theologian, summarized the new understanding of the faith in an emblematic sentence: "Praxis is the shape of the faith in this epoch in Latin America." In

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<sup>22</sup> Medellín and Puebla, *idem*.

this way, Christians overcame that accusation of Cardinal Sebastião Leme of Rio de Janeiro, who affirmed in his struggles against the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas in the decades of the twenties and thirties: "Brazilian Catholics are a majority, but an inefficacious majority."

Cardinal Leme was affirming that Catholics were an inefficacious majority, but the Brazilian hierarchy could not identify the cause of this inefficacy. The root of the question lay at a dichotomy between faith and life, not in the religious ignorance of the people as he interpreted it. Social, political and economic problems were situated in the area of the profane but the Church could not become involved with profane matters, since it dealt with the sacred, and so it was there that the cause for the inefficacy of the majority of Brazilian Catholics was found.

Out of Greek philosophical dichotomies were born theological and doctrinal dichotomies between the profane and the sacred, the spiritual and the material, body and soul, and in this way the life of faith was rationalized by reducing it to doctrine and commandments, that is, to dogmatic and moral theology. Just knowing the doctrine meant having the faith. Both young children and engaged couples were asked about faith with the questions of the same little catechism of Christian doctrine. If they were able to answer those questions, they could make their first communion or celebrate their wedding. On the contrary, they might have been better prepared, that is, if they had memorized the catechism. Faith became confused with its doctrinal formulation, since for scholasticism essence precedes existence.

To these dichotomies were associated a certain pessimism and negativity in regard to the world, to matter and to the body, the result of the influence of the Manichaeism of Saint Augustine and the Jansenism of the school of Saint Victor,<sup>23</sup> of which even Saint Vincent was a victim. Within this concept, politics and social questions were profane realities and had to be exorcised by the pastoral ministry of the Church, inasmuch as the Church was supposed to be occupied exclusively with the salvation of souls, since

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<sup>23</sup> ROBERT P. MALONEY (in his *The Way of Vincent de Paul*) writes that Jansenism was in the air that Saint Vincent breathed; MAURÍLIO JOSÉ CAMELLO DE OLIVEIRA, *Caraça: centro mineiro de educação e missão*, Belo Horizonte, 1969: holds that the preaching of the Vincentians was influenced by Jansenist ideas. The reform of the Brazilian clergy, sponsored by Dom Viçoso with the French Vincentians, brought about a large group of holy and well-educated clergy, but profoundly marked by Jansenism, according to the historian Riolando Azzi, and the volumes of the history of the Church in Latin America by CEHILA. The slogan of Dom Viçoso was: Holy and well-instructed priests for the discipline of the clergy.

the spirit was considered to be the principle of good, while the body and matter were principles of evil. Consequently, the Church advocated punishing the body, matter, to free the spirit, to save the soul. The Church's proper area had to be the sacristy, and priests and bishops should have been men of the sacred, occupied only with spiritual questions, with the mission of saving souls. The pastoral activity of the Church should have been only the practice of charitable assistance. The struggle for social justice, the transformation of reality and human rights sounded like Marxist and communist teaching, even though they had been themes already broached in the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI.

Modern philosophies helped us to surpass this dichotomy, and the Second Vatican Council helped us to overcome pessimism and negativity relative to the world, to matter, and to the body with its theology of earthy realities. Good and evil are conjoined in all earthly realities and, in all of them, the seeds of the Word have been planted, and they come to be through the mystery of redemption. But the Second Vatican Council showed us that the true faith is that which brings the institutional Church to make a preferential option for the poor and the excluded, and leads to individual and communitarian conversion and to the transformation of unjust structures. In a word, it leads to conversion. It was in this way that Jesus preached and left an example in the Gospel. He was killed because he preached and fought against unjust structures. In the same way, Leo XIII in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* sounded the alert for the need of the Church to defend the multitude of workers massacred by the cruelty of liberal bosses.<sup>24</sup>

The book of Vincentian spirituality published by Fr. Robert Maloney,<sup>25</sup> *The Way of Saint Vincent* pinpointed the changes that favored the new understanding of the Vincentian virtues. The first one is precisely a change of methodology. *The Way of Saint Vincent* (p. 48) identified the changes that led to a new understanding of the Vincentian virtues. The one mentioned is precisely a change of methodology. "A change in philosophical and theological methodology. The emphasis here has shifted from a classical to a more historical way of thinking. The classicist mentality is deductive. It emphasizes universal principles and necessary conclusions.... The method tends to be abstract and *a priori*.... The method has been applied systematically to dogmatic, moral, and spiritual questions. The historical mode of thinking emphasizes changing circumstances

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<sup>24</sup> LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891; PIUS XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, 1931, forty years after *Rerum Novarum*. Both encyclicals defended the rights of workers against the greed of the bosses.

<sup>25</sup> ROBERT P. MALONEY, *idem*, pp. 48-52.

and contingent conclusions. It begins with concrete data, employs an empirical method, stresses hermeneutics, and draws its conclusions inductively from its sources.... A significant consequence of this shift in emphasis in philosophical and theological methodology is that change has come to find a greater place in our expectations. People today are willing to accept fewer absolutes. They question absolute prohibitions which were formerly accepted." This change of perspective convinced us that no case is the same as another, and it gave rise to an increasing cultural, religious, philosophical and theological pluralism. This change of outlook on the study of theology, philosophy, pastoral ministry and scripture was fundamental in the transformation of the pastoral activity of the Church in Latin America. It was here, then, that the preferential option for the poor in America was joined to the founding charism of the works inspired by Vincentian spirituality, the love for the poor.

### **A new concept of faith**

The concept that best translated the integration of these dichotomies is the concept of praxis. Faith is praxis. And what is that? Praxis is the articulation between a theory, a concept, or a discourse and an activity or a practice, with hopes of transformation. Praxis is free and conscious, and it has a finality, an intentionality. Theology has to be a discourse that reflects on Christian practice, and our practice has to be illuminated by a theory.

This was the fundamental change that transformed the conception and the living out of faith in Latin America. From this were born and became popular the expressions: faith and life, word of God and reality; Christian faith and social engagement; Christian faith and political commitment. Out of this, the pastoral activity of the bishops became a commitment, whose preaching and specific pastoral activity were destined to transform the social, political and economic reality. This preaching sensitized a great part of the clergy and corresponded to the worries of the poor. It brought about hope and nourished the readiness to struggle. In this way were born various instruments of struggle: pastoral ministries, social movements, demands, the participation of Christians in social and political questions, the "Brotherhood Campaigns," the "Cry of the Excluded." The meetings of the bishops began systematically with a presentation of an analysis of a social, political and economic reality. The Bishops' Conference of Brazil makes use every two months on its internet site of an analysis of an issue done by persons who reflect on the theology, philosophy and pastoral outreach of the Church in Brazil.

All praxis generates conflict. Conflict is inherent in praxis. Conflict is not done just for the pleasure of creating conflict. Society,

certainly, is formed from different social segments and is divided into competing classes. Those who benefit from this unjust structure grab, tooth and nail, their privileges, advantages and interests to guarantee their state of wellbeing or their own social status. For this reason, they intransigently defend their condition and their position in the dominant society. They impede the creation of mechanisms for the distribution of returns and this is the great cause of social problems. As far as this goes, those who are victims of injustice struggle to transform the unjust structures and acquire some rights and a certain liberty that represent a different future with hope for better days, in which everyone might take part.

The conception of faith as practice was likewise no different. It provoked many conflicts with the military dictatorships representing international capitalism and the dominant elite in these countries. Against their opponents, they always used the cliché of being Communists, and at the time it was sufficient to round them up, arrest them, torture them, exile them and even kill them. Conflict also took place within the hierarchy between those bishops and priests working for social and political transformation, and those other bishops and priests who defended dichotomized doctrine and a Church alien to social questions. Because of this, the Church in Latin America recovered a dimension of prophecy and perceived itself, as a result of its incarnational preaching, as touched with martyrdom. There also arose prophets both true and false, martyrs and murderers, but with this originality: Christians were torturing, defaming and executing other Christians during the era of the military regimes in various Latin American countries.

## Conclusion

The encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* provoked this reflection of ours and forced us to deepen our thought on the Vincentian charism and on the preferential option for the poor in Latin America. Here we recall the parables of Jesus about the relation between the word of God and action for justice and right, the preaching of the word of God and the construction of the kingdom. "Whoever hears the word of God and does not put it into practice is like the crazy man who built his house on sand. Wind and storm came and destroyed the house." The house fell since it was without foundation. "The prudent man, by contrast, is the one who hears the word of God and puts it into practice. Wind and storm may come, but the house will not fall since it is built on rock."<sup>26</sup> The rock is the link between hearing the word and putting it into practice.

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<sup>26</sup> Mt 7:24-27.



It is worthwhile here to recall a sentence often repeated by a layman, the leader of the Brazilian laity, Alceu de Amoroso Lima: "The kingdom of God starts here or it never starts...." This is his translation in proverb of a theological idea: the kingdom of God has already arrived, it is already among us. But it is still not definitive and it has not yet been finished. It exists, in fact, only in the eschaton, in eternal life. The action and preaching of Saint Vincent were the word of God becoming *dabar* [word] in the midst of the people, the event of God, divine action, the dynamic of the kingdom becoming leaven in the dough. In the same way, the preferential option of the Church in Latin America for the poor is also coming into being, as the Bible is changing into a word of God for the people: action, presence, dynamism, transformation of human history into the history of salvation. This is why in the Gospel Jesus told his opponents: "If you do not believe in me, at least believe in my works, since they testify to me."<sup>27</sup>

This preaching and pastoral activity of the Church and the confronting of conflicts help the prophetic dimension in the Church to advance and cause the dimension of martyrdom to rise again among Christians. We keep learning of the innumerable prophets of social causes and of the struggle for justice and right. In the dark times of dictatorship, we recall the courageous actions of Bishop Oscar Romero, Leonidas Proaño, Cardinal Silva Henriques, Bishops Ivo and Aloísio Lorscheider, Paulo Evaristo Arns, Hélder Câmara, José Maria Pires, Waldir Calheiros, Pedro Casaldáliga, Luciano Mendes de Almeida and many others.

Some of these prophets paid with their own life, falling as martyrs, shedding their own blood, the victims of political persecution. In this list too are the various religious assassinated in El Salvador, particularly Bishop Oscar Romero, Elacuria, Rutillo Grande and many others. In Brazil we have Santo Dias, Margarida, Father João Bosco Penido Burneir, Father Henrique, Brother Tito, Alexandre Vanucci, Eugênio Lyra, Father Josimo de Moraes Tavares and others. In Nicaragua many Christians, both lay and religious, were engaged in the Sandinista revolution because of their faith in Jesus Christ and in the Gospel.

Among the most noteworthy pastoral works in this struggle for the implantation of social justice in these countries, we can point to CPT (Comissão Pastoral da Terra), the CIMI (Centro Indigenista Missionário), the base Christian communities, and the Movimentos de Fé e Política, the Commissions of Justice and Peace, and groups of Caritas. We are, however, still far from social justice, but there is no lack of disposition for the struggle.

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<sup>27</sup> Jn 5:31-38.

Now, a statement from the president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, reveals the efficacy of Catholics in political transformation. He said after his election: "The base Christian communities had a more important role to play in my election than even the trade unions did...." This faith and love incarnate in practice are becoming the salt of the earth and the leaven in the dough. "Fear not: Courage! I have overcome the world,"<sup>28</sup> Jesus said in the Gospel.

[For a complete listing of bibliographical references, not otherwise available in English, the reader may turn to the Spanish edition of *Vincentiana* or may request them from the editor.]

(JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M., translator)

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<sup>28</sup> Jn 16:33.



# Reflections on *Deus Caritas Est*<sup>1</sup>

by Jimmy A. Belita, C.M.

*Province of the Philippines*

## Introduction

It is jokingly said that God must have loved the poor that is why there are so many of them! The same thing is said about Filipinos who must be loved by God who creates so many of them. Filipinos by nature are loving people, easy to relate to and, for the most part, pro-life. It is no accident, then, that the Philippines has one of the fastest growing populations in the region with a large percentage of young people. That is a proof, some may say, that there is so much love going around in these islands! I certainly hope so but, then, one would sigh: if only life-making through love-making were linked to long-term plans for a better quality of life! The only problem is that it is not necessarily so and the unregulated proliferation of life even affects the quality of life that makes it easy for love to flourish. The integration of love and life, then, is crucial and, hopefully, Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, can make some clarification and provide the needed light.

I see the encyclical as not just another papal exhortation to the virtue of love. Here, one can read an insightful ontology of love. It is not moralistic and does not pretend to be a self-righteous denunciation of contemporary humans' aberrations from true love. It can serve, I think, as an adequate philosophical underpinning of the theology of love which does not dismiss eros as an unnecessary component but rather integrates it into the totality of love. The young innovative theologian, Ratzinger, that he was, is surfacing here.

This is a great work that delineates and clarifies the ongoing dispute concerning love and justice. Its re-reading of the parables on practical charity, like the Good Samaritan, fills gaps on the dispute. It reminds us of the inadequacy of justice alone in our dealing with others and with society. For justice alone, without love, is, in the pope's expression, "arid." It is also worth noting that the encyclical draws from the imaginative sources of the bible rather than from a

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<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter to the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All The Lay Faithful on Christian Love (Deus Caritas Est)*, 25 December 2005.

worn-out and outdated theory of the law of nature. This has a consequence on our reflection later on in the issue of population.

When everybody else is avoiding the concept of charity for its connotation of paternalism and dole-out mode of beneficence, the Holy Father does not hesitate to revive it. He has a good rationale for reviving the concept. After all, the original connotation of the word "charity," as its Greek origin suggests, refers to what God's grace is all about: a generous outpouring of the divine love. Any concept of love and justice should really flow from that primal meaning of charity as God's graciousness, that is not dependent on any human consideration.

The second part of the encyclical leads us to concrete acts of charity that cannot be generalized but can only be realized in a certain place with a certain group of people. If it is done, only then can we escape the irony of Charlie Brown's statement in the comic strip, *The Gospel according to Peanuts*: "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand!" From his vantage, Benedict XVI cannot really do more than make "generalizations" concerning charity, for the moment he focuses on one situation he might in the process neglect the others, although, at times, one can detect in his letter the spirit of a bourgeois Bavarian! But that is really innocuous given his commitment to the marginalized in the Church.

We see the potential danger of a localized reflection being made normative in different contexts. Any reflection of the Pope that is contextualized in Europe might be taken in hook and sinker by the Catholics in developing countries where he is overwhelmingly popular. For instance, an alarmist statement that he might make concerning the crisis of zero population growth in his continent might spell disaster if that same statement is addressed to a developing world like the Philippines, where population growth is anything but zero. But, we give the benefit of the doubt to the Holy Father to whatever he says on charity and justice for there is always a way in which the best of human nature tends to permeate through different milieus and environments. Likewise, it is no wonder that St. Vincent's charitable response to the peculiar situation of the poor in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century still makes helpful echoes in our society today for the simple reason that charity has a universal appeal. In fact, I have a hunch that Vincent's observations and practical advices on charity would find parallels in this latest papal encyclical.

In *Deus Caritas Est* we have answers, but what are the questions? In its second part especially, we have responses to the many questions asked concerning love, charity and justice, but they are still in need of interpretation according to the questions asked which would inevitably vary according to cultural context and social situation. As it is said, "different strokes for different folks." It is in

this regard that, first, we have to describe the situation in the Philippines today, brief though it may be, in issues touching charity and justice. The situation needs critiquing in the light of Vincent's and Benedict's respective positions on the relationship between those two virtues; only then can concrete actions be proposed.

### Seeing the Situation

It is safe to say that the Philippines is one of the economically underdeveloped countries characterized by "poverty, high birthrates, and economic dependence on the advanced countries."<sup>2</sup> Poverty does not exist alone; it is accompanied by malnutrition, decline in basic education and limited access to health care. Thus, it has an impact on the quality of life. We can theorize, at best, concerning the country's predicament. Whether the facts that we present are really causes or effects of the nation's ills we can argue *ad infinitum*, but what is certain is that they are closely interrelated. Here I am referring to globalization and population.

Globalization has its good aspects; no less than the Holy Father, himself, has positive words for it. "[H]ere we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization — we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care" (n° 30a). Concern for our neighbor transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. Although it might have its good aspects, globalization is also blamed for a lot of things. Here are some generalizations attributed to this contemporary phenomenon. Just by looking at its promoters like World Bank, IMF, WTO, and major corporations we can already surmise what policies are obviously advantageous for them: uniform economic model, homogenized global rules, new resources, new markets, cheap labor.<sup>3</sup> Globalization favors export-oriented agriculture which means that the traditional, small-scale, diversified agricultural models have to go and have to abandon the time-tested effectiveness of locally concocted fertilizers, crop rotations, and pesticide management. To produce "luxury export items — flowers, potted plants, beef, shrimp, cotton, coffee, exotic vegetables — to be sent to the already overfed countries," people have to give up even their own lands and become dependent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> GERALD CHALIAND, [www.thirdworldteacher.com/General/ThirdWorld\\_def.html/](http://www.thirdworldteacher.com/General/ThirdWorld_def.html/)

<sup>3</sup> JERRY MANDER - DEBI BAKER - DAVID KORTEN, "Does Globalization Help the Poor?," in *IFG Bulletin, International Forum on Globalization*, 2001, 1(3).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

It is easy to lay the blame on an outside factor like globalization. There is another issue from which the Church, like the proverbial ostrich head, cannot keep on hiding. In its report to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Philippine Commission on Population pointed out the government's continued concern with "reproductive health, the status of women, and the interrelationships linking population, resources, environment, and development."<sup>5</sup> Concern with population is understandable in the context of its increase to around 81 million by the turn of the century and it is expected to reach 113 million by 2020.<sup>6</sup>

Increase in population for a country with poor economic productivity points to a lowering of the quality of life. The GNP per capita income of the Philippines in 1995 was merely \$1,050 (compared to the United States' \$38,000 or Italy's \$22,000).<sup>7</sup> It is also to be noted that in this country the lower the educational status of the woman is, the more children she has, just as the poorer the family is the more children and even extended family there are to support. Who is accountable? A Jesuit priest's observation on the issue is very telling. "For more than 30 years, the Church hierarchy has opposed efforts by the state to initiate a vigorous family-planning program, but during all these years it has not been able to come up with its own program adequate to the need."<sup>8</sup> The same good Father accepts, though, that overpopulation might be a national issue in the Philippines, but not necessarily an issue linked to poverty in other countries, where they even need more people to maintain their population.<sup>9</sup>

Both globalization and overpopulation affect social justice more negatively. Globalization confirms the cliché that the rich get richer and the poor get more babies! In a competitive world, those who have will have more since they already have the resources and can muster strategies to strangle poor competitors. Besides, it is the rich countries that make the rules, giving a new twist to the Golden Rule ("he, who has the gold, rules"). In an overpopulation, more beings compete for the scarce resources and the mighty can muscle their way to seize the bigger piece of the pie. Social inequality is a glaring

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<sup>5</sup> PHILIPPINE COMMISSION ON POPULATION, *The Philippines: Country Report on Population*, Manila, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> PHILIPPINES NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *1990 Census of Population and Housing. Report No. 3*, Manila, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> INDEX OF WORLD COUNTRIES, [www.scarufi.com/politics/gnp.htm](http://www.scarufi.com/politics/gnp.htm)

<sup>8</sup> FR. JOHN J. CARROLL, S.J., "A Window of Opportunity. An Unmet Need," in *Intersect*, 19(2):4-9, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

reality as one sees that 90 percent of the resources are controlled by ten percent of the population. In a pyramid, the ten percent at the top allow only some percentage of the resources to trickle down to the 90 percent.

### Judging the Situation through Vincent and Benedict

Justice is a buzz word today among theological circles. It is often said that our age is the age of entitlement, in virtue of which people everywhere clamor for their rights and for justice to be given them. But love, too, is a mandate that cannot be ignored either, in the face of animosities that often arise from confrontation. Justice without love becomes arid, the papal document declares, and even, we may add, ruthless. That is a point to be considered by our agents for social justice. Christian charity goes also beyond what is merely proper (cf. n° 18) and legal, for through it one also encounters God first whose love, even for the unlovable, cannot leave us indifferent either. I am glad that the Holy Father reminds us of this fundamental reality about God's love and its practical application through charity. He will agree with other social analysts on the facts concerning social injustice that breeds inequalities, but he warns especially the local Churches for the role that they might assume to meet the issue.

For the Pope, in his letter, conversion is an important factor for a happy balance between justice and charity. For charity to be effective and transformative for the beneficiaries, the benefactors must undergo transformation, too. The encyclical talks about the need for kenosis in the practice of charity. *"This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world — the Cross — and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid"* (n° 35). It is a warning to those who in any way might accompany their beneficent work with a concerted effort to win over the beneficiaries to their faith or ideology. This can also take the form of a condescending help by arrogant do-gooders who might have other ulterior motives. The poor are vulnerable to proselytization because their extreme needs make them accept anything. The encyclical is unequivocal in this issue. *"Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends.... Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love"* (n° 31c). This vulnerability was exemplified by the conversion of

many Chinese refugees from Mao's China to Catholicism in Hong Kong in the 40s and 50s. They were called "rice Catholics" because this staple food that was distributed by Caritas, a Catholic aid organization, must have lured them to the faith. When the need for rice stopped (simply because Hong Kong Chinese prospered) mass conversion also stopped.

There is a statement in the second part of the letter that strikes me as similar to Vincent's remark about apologizing to the poor for the bread that we give. *"Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own"* (n° 35). Are Vincent and Benedict thinking of the possible vain or superior thoughts that the givers might be entertaining while they are giving? If so, and if they subsequently find themselves merely using the recipients for their own vanity, should they not, then, apologize to the "victims"? The apology would also be in order if the act of giving occasions the recipients to look down on themselves by accepting dole-outs given to them. Vincent in anticipating a possible miscommunication would make the golden rule a criterion for doing good to others. He says: "What is the first act of love?... To do good to others as we may reasonably desire that they would do unto us is the summary of charity. Can I bear witness to myself that I do to my neighbor what I wish him to do to me? That is a subject for a searching examination."<sup>10</sup> Vincent in this passage indirectly points to empathy as an attitude or framework that will mitigate the asymmetry of doing good to others.

*"As a community, the Church must practice love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community"* (n° 20). This reminds us of Vincent's impassioned appeal for an organized assistance to a stricken family who would be better off in the future if help were planned and organized, including self-rehabilitation. Charity is free and spontaneous, but it needs structure and organization if it is to endure in the life of people. In the Philippine situation, there might be a lot of love going around, but unless it is translated into enlightened and rational management, it will not be effective. Reduction of poverty in this country needs a lot of enlightened planning that is responsive to the needs of the people. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCPII) recommends the empowerment of the poor to make their own history in the warm embrace of charity and in a system and milieu

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<sup>10</sup> PIERRE COSTE, C.M., *Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul*, Translated by Joseph Leonard, C.M., Edited Eastern Province, U.S.A., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1963, p. 584.

that is conducive to it.<sup>11</sup> This is also one way of remedying the proverbial Filipino fatalistic attitude which obstructs development.

Globalization is here to stay together with the other post-colonial blues like dependency, widening economic gap between classes, and overpopulation. The time of Vincent saw semblances of the dependency and alienation of the poor who only became poorer and poorer during his time. Vincent's work was to bring "emergency" assistance to the homeless and starving through a more organized and concerted effort with the collaboration of the rich and the well-to-do. He did not pay too much attention to objections of others who frowned at the prospect of multiplying mendicancy or consorting with the rich. Neither was he fazed by the misgivings of the religious traditionalists who could not see a form of religious life outside of the cloister. Never mind the philosophy and ideology, he might have told himself, for if "the charity of Jesus Christ urges us," who are we to do otherwise. Of course, Vincent went global, too, by sending missionaries both priests and sisters outside of France with only charity as the "arm."

The Pope by writing his first encyclical on charity is sending the message that this will be the only norm a charity worker should rely on. Corollary to this is the realization that even if the law of nature is traditionally normative in the Church, yet it cannot be the sole norm. As with justice, compliance with the law of nature, devoid of charity, would be a clanging cymbal, an arid norm. It is to be noted that the Pope in his encyclical mentions natural law only once and in passing; besides, in that same line he also reminds the faithful of the role of reason (cf. n° 28a). Should not this be a turning point in our moral approach, especially in the issue of human reproduction, which, because of an outdated view of nature (as if it has stood still), we cannot yet shake off our population predicament. We have been too dependent on the natural law theory to shore up the traditional stand of the Church on birth control issues. The encyclical's emphasis on love seems to signal to us a different direction. This would be a welcome shift in the minds of many Filipino Catholics, who on their own have already steered away from that law and rather put in the foreground the value of effective love translated into a quality life, which consists in a reduced family size, among others.

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<sup>11</sup> SECOND PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES, *Acts and Decrees*, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Manila, 1992.



## Decisive Actions

How the Church should act in consonance with the encyclical has been proffered itself by a popular columnist in a daily newspaper with the widest circulation. In his perception of the Church in the Philippines as having "an interventionist tendency," he is practically telling activist bishops that the encyclical "does not encourage excessive political activism." Likewise, for the people in government who think that clerics should only stay in the sacristy the columnist reminds them that neither does the Pope's letter "*offer comfort to secular regimes that have become engulfed by crisis over political acts that have been engulfed by crisis....*"<sup>12</sup> Asians in general, and Filipinos in particular, have no problem receiving papal directives that actually promote harmony, considered a virtue in this part of the world. This is an important point for people in the Church in the Philippines whose concern, they believe, is the transformation of society. Its transformation, among others, would inevitably include the reduction of poverty, the humanization of globalization, and the rational management of the population problem.

The State's efforts to reduce family size simply slowed down because the Church made strong objections, but, as Fr. Carroll remarked, the Church did not offer an alternative either. This time the Church should allow the government to fulfill its political duty to manage population problems without undue intervention, as long as intrinsically evil methods, like abortion, are not employed. The same thing is true with matters of justice where "*the Church must not replace the State to bring about a just society.... She has to play her part through rational argument.... A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church*" (n° 28). I can say that the papal document, in complementing justice with charity with emphasis on the latter, would actually prefer less confrontational modes of exercising justice; this is very Oriental, let me say, since it fits best with the people's preference for harmonious relationships.

The encyclical does not touch on the explosive population issue but I do not think there is any doubt in our minds that the pope is pro-life and would espouse pro-life causes. Living in Europe for practically all his life with all the zero-population growth around, he cannot feel the seriousness of the "population bomb" that is threatening the Philippines. But it seems that in his letter, there is a significant shift in the guiding principles. Basically, he does not invoke that "law" in a lot of moral issues discussed in the encyclical. The papal document, instead, is heavy on the scriptural underpinnings of love and justice. I would personally like to hear

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<sup>12</sup> AMANDO DORONILA, "Roles of State and Church," in *Philippine Daily Enquirer*, 10 February 2006.



Asian bishops addressing the population issue not from an "arid" law of nature but from the dynamic "law" of love. The law of nature has no feeling and therefore does not lead to empathy. The law of love makes empathy an inseparable element. If only we look at the poor with empathy can we be more understanding of their need to control the size of their family so its members can enjoy a quality of life without feeling guilty about it.

Besides the population problem there are other issues arising from globalization; they also merit our attention and action. The document addresses itself to *"those who carry out the Church's charitable activity in the practical level... [who] must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works in love"* (n° 33). So, in the domains of "trade justice" and "justice in debt" the Church can still be prophetic and at the same time mindful of the papal exhortation to be guided by that faith working in love. The Church can live its own kenosis by begging the rich countries to end their massive subsidies of their own exporters so "the poor countries can feed their people by protecting their own farmers and staple crops." The Church, instead of demanding justice, can appeal to the generosity of the rich countries and their institutions "to act immediately to cancel all the unpaid debts of the poorest countries." If the debts cannot really be cancelled for political or other reasons, at least, "poor countries be given more grants, rather than seeing their debt burden piled even higher with yet more loans."<sup>13</sup>

There will surely be other non-governmental agencies (NGOs) who will, in the name of right and justice, take the cudgels for the alleged "victim" countries. It is more appropriate for the Church, instead, to use persuasion which is the way of charity. Who knows if this non-interventionist way will turn out to be more effective in the long run? Thus speaks the Pope: *"Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: 'If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing' (1 Cor 13:3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter"* (n° 34).

The Church in this country has been accused of obstruction of development, because of its population policies and its inability to educate morally graduates from its elite schools, who later find

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<sup>13</sup> CHALIAND, *op. cit.*

themselves participating in running the country. I think the wholesale accusation is inaccurate but, somehow, it contains some truths. The Church, too, shares responsibility in whatever havoc colonialism did in the past for it was part of the establishment. Would not this be a timely opportunity, therefore, for the Church to do its own *mea culpa*, like the recent popes did when they asked pardon for faults committed not only by its "children" but also by its institutions? The ensuing credibility would contribute a lot in order for charity to remove the aridity of justice. It would be another expression of kenosis.

Education is a great tool of the Church in the Philippines, for many of best schools are Catholic, which educate the majority of the children of the elite or of the "ruling" class. Beside the inculcation of values, to forge the ability or the competence to manage responsibly and equitably the scarce resources should never be missed in education. Naturally, this will involve the Church's both traditional and innovative works of charity. The Church, at this point, has not merely involved itself in issues concerning celibacy or liturgical inculturation; it is embroiled now in non-ecclesiastical matters like mining and the clamor for the president's resignation. Should not the hierarchical Church leave this matter to the educated laity, who might have the technical expertise for such mundane matters? The Pope's encyclical highlights the proper relationship of the Church to the State and, as Mr. Doronila, in effect, remarked in his column, no particular sector of society has a sole claim on righteousness or a monopoly of justice.<sup>14</sup> These are issues that are better handled in education early on; that goes a long way in the humanization and professionalization of our educational system, otherwise our schools will merely manufacture workers for the multinational companies here and abroad but will not, unfortunately, form leaders at home. Sadly, the Pope's vision of a well-planned and organized effort for development only flies in the face of over-politicking by political leaders whose intentions seem to be very far from those insightful lessons on love and justice extolled in *Deus Caritas Est*. The Holy Father has added his encyclical to the best kept secrets of the Church; when will we ever learn?

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<sup>14</sup> DORONILA, *op. cit.*

# Charity: The Exercise of Love on the Part of the Church as a "Community of Love"

by José-Vicente Martínez Muedra, C.M.

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## 1. Introduction: the Trinitarian dimension of the Congregation

The human being is created in the image and likeness of God because he tends to create a community. Therefore God created man and woman (cf. Gen 1:27) and this image and likeness of God alludes to the triune God: the transparent and unbreakable communion of the three divine persons united in love. The theses of Bruno Forte and Leonardo Boff show a certain influence of St. Vincent de Paúl who used to defined God as a Family of Love. Moreover, Bruno Forte and Leonardo Boff, in turn, speak of God as Community of Love that possesses vitality and dynamism.

In our Vincentian communities, we find this type of vitality and dynamism expressed in the Constitutions: "The Community is continually responsible for its own development, especially as we renew the principal elements of our way of living and acting. These are: 1. Following Christ the Evangelizer as a community, which generates in us special bonds of love and affection; in this spirit we should, *'like good friends'* (CR, VIII, 2), join reverence for one another with genuine esteem" (*Constitutions*, 25, 1).

Pannenberg speaks of the one and self-differentiating God. God is not identity. The revelation of God in Jesus includes three aspects:

- **The Experience of Jesus** who senses himself as united with the Father and moved by the impulse of the Spirit. Jesus shares an intimacy with the Father that is given by the Spirit. This intimacy is rooted and lived in the Father.
- **The life of the first Christian community** comes to be as a continuation of Jesus' religiosity. It is within this perspective that we ought to read article twenty of our Constitutions which follows: "The Church finds the ultimate source of its life and action in the Trinity. The Congregation, within the Church, does the same."

1. Gathered in community to announce the Father's love for all, we express that same love in our own life.
  2. We follow Christ who called apostles and disciples and shared a fraternal life with them to evangelize the poor.
  3. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we build up a unity among ourselves to achieve our mission, and so offer credible witness to Christ the Savior.
- Also under **Community Prayer** we read: "We ought to show special honor and devotion to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation" (cf. *Constitutions*, no. 48).

The biblical basis for these doctrinal points are found in the Gospel of St. Mark where Jesus gives the instruction about Christian community: In Mark 3:20-21 and 3:31-35, we observe that Mark makes a play on the word brother. In the first instance, he makes reference to Jesus' blood relations (cf. Mark 3:20-21; Gen. 13:8; and 14:14-16). In the second instance, Jesus refers to the accepted use of "brother" with regard to membership in the tribe (cf. Mark 3:31-35; and Num. 8:26; 16:10; 36:2). Thus the Christian community is a community of brothers, a fraternity, comprised of those who love well, follow, and listen to the Master who is Christ following the will of the Father.

## 2. Charity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 19)

The Pope specifies how this community of friends that loves one another is to be a model of love, and which is patterned on the love with which Christ loved us (cf. John 13:34 ff.). Moreover, Christ gives us life by way of love (cf. John 13:13) for the redemption and service of others (cf. John 13:13-17; Mark 10:44-45). This is the greatest kind of love (Αγάπη) that God has manifested to humanity (cf. John 3:16). Jesus Christ makes himself neighbor. In addition, Christ shares in humanity and he acts as the Good Samaritan of the poor (cf. Luke 10:29-37). According to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the reason why both the priest and Levite pass at a distance is not for the lack of generosity, rather a scrupulous respect for the law prohibited them from contact with a cadaver (cf. Numb. 5:2; 19:2-13). The power of the parable consists in the Samaritan — not an observer of the Law — who shows himself to be the true follower of the spirit of the Law. He places love above any other personal interest. Following this line of reasoning, the *Constitutions* no. 18 recommends that the provinces take initiatives in order to imitate Christ, the "Good Samaritan" who goes out to relieve the needs of the poor.

The Pope calls us to become infected with this love of Christ in the same manner that one contracts the flu. In a similar vein, St. Vincent speaks to us: "It is certain that I have been sent, not only to love God, but that God might be loved. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love God. I need to love my neighbor, as an image of God and an object of God's love, and to work [...] so that by virtue of a mutual love they love one another through the love of God, who loved them to the point of surrendering his only Son to death" (ES XI, 553).

The missionary mode of evangelization calls people to conversion by making them participants in the Sacraments. Furthermore, the visible sign that gives credibility to this Good News is human promotion and is Trinitarian love. "Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs" (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 19). Our constitutions summarize this idea in the following manner: "The love (Αγάπη) of Christ, who had pity on the crowd (Mark 8:2), is the source of all our apostolic activity, and urges us, in the words of St. Vincent, 'to make the gospel really effective' (SV XII, 84). According to the varying circumstances of time and place, our work of evangelization in word and action should strive for this, that all, through a process of conversion and celebration of the sacraments, should be faithful to the 'kingdom, that is to say, the new world, the new order, the new manner of being, of living, of living community, which the gospel inaugurates' [*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 23]" (*Constitutions*, no. 11).

### 3. Charity as a work of the Church (*Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 20-25)

The Pope begins to speak to us concerning the building of the Christian community by referring to the pillars upon which the community stands. The first Christians discovered that Jesus (with the Holy Spirit that made them recognize their calling at Pentecost) was sending them to communicate his message of salvation to all men and women throughout the world.

In order that they be faithful to this double task (*to live united and to be evangelizers*) the community discovered that they needed four fundamental tools in order to build a true Christian community: **Catechesis** (*the first witness to the life of Jesus*); **Communal Prayer** (*an intense and deep communion with God*); **Sharing of Goods** (*a genuine communion with those of greatest need*); and the **Eucharist** (*the summary and nourishment of all that following Jesus means*).

**Catechesis:** The first generation of Christians heard first hand about the life, works, miracles, and marvels of Jesus of Nazareth. Part of these took written form (the Gospels), or became part of the tradition

about the transcendental fact of the resurrection of Christ (Letters) with the famous discovery of the empty tomb.

Catechesis has had and continues to have its *raison d'être* in the Church for the purpose of forming (permanent formation) its members. In the permanent formation of its members, the Church does for its members what other groups do for their members. For example an electrician, a physician, or a mechanic updates himself. The Christian, likewise, has the most agreeable duty to better understand his/her faith. Formation is essential for authentic Christian living, and goes well beyond a superficial response of mere appearances.

**Common prayer:** The entire community places itself in God's hands, offering to God its hopes, dreams, joys, interceding for both the needs of the Christian Community and those of the world.

**Sharing of material resources:** These are shared for the sake of the needs of the Church and of the poor. This allows the Christian community to live with a decided austerity, while knowing how to use the goods with courage.

A Christian who does not attend mass and lives in solidarity with the poor is confessing God with his works but he lacks the spiritual element so as to profess God with the lips. On the other hand, a Christian that goes to mass and does not become one with the poor, is a Christian in name only. The Church has received the poor as its inheritance from Jesus, it has the joyful obligation to evangelize the poor and to help them with every kind of need. Any church can call itself Christian, yet if it relegates to the government alone the care of the poor, then it fails to be a Christian community in truth. It may be that its adherents are on fire for Jesus because of the preacher's words. However, if their following of Jesus does not include the poor, then they are fueling emotion that misses the essential point of Jesus' mission.

**The Eucharist:** People tend to gravitate with those that share their dreams, their interests, and to celebrate. Every celebration has two elements which must be taken into account: The remembrance of the past historical event and its implication of this event for the future. In Spain we celebrate the New Year's Eve party, and it illustrates concretely these two realities. We remember that the year has passed (12 grapes) and we begin a year that promises to be better than the previous (a toast and a drink of wine). These two realities are identified with the traditional meal of 12 o'clock midnight.

All these elements are found in the celebration of the Eucharist or the mass: **We celebrate our identity as a People of God saved by Christ;** not only do we recall what happened that first holy Friday

in history, we also celebrate the day when we will be with Him in heaven. These two realities form the background of our celebration.

While celebrating this identity, I am conscious that there are brothers that do not have the same dignity that I share and love urges me to solidarity with them to whom I am sent to help (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 22).

God gathers the Christian community in order to hear the Word. God also assembles the community before the altar so that it may share the meal of brotherhood. The community receives Jesus who gives himself as nourishment. Subsequently, the community is sent by Jesus to announce the Good News.

As the Early Church organized itself in the task of evangelization, it apportioned various ministries. Some of its leaders retained the ministry of the Word, and others were charged with the ministry of charity as a fundamental work. Thus the apostles were the principal animators of evangelization, and the mission of the deacons (cf. Acts 6:1-6) was defined by the principle of co-responsibility and collaboration in evangelization.

St. Vincent prepared the laity for the popular missions and the missions *ad gentes* in order begin and maintain the Confraternities of Charity in each mission, so that there would be a response to the needs of the poor. Moreover, St. Vincent de Paúl exhorted the missionaries that they were not to neglect meeting the material needs of the poor either by their own or with the help of recruits from among the people who would do this work (cf. ES XI, 393).

Pope Benedict writes: "Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections:

- a) The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (κeryγμα - μαρτυρια), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (διακονια)." These signs gives credibility to the announcement and comes to be an affect Gospel. "These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.
- b) The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas- agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter 'by chance' (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting



from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: 'So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith' (6:10)" (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 25).

#### 4. Justice and Peace (nos. 26-29)

Pope Benedict XVI refers to the Marxist critique of the social order. Part of the change, in the search for a new social order to eradicate poverty came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was derived from Marxism. It critiqued the reduction of charity to its minimum in the form of almsgiving. Actually in the West new structures have been created, for example, the Welfare State, that admit the politics of reinsertion of the marginalized into society while applying two principals of political life (solidarity and subsidiarity). Because this formula was not followed the Welfare State has entered a period of crisis because of paternalism. One of the results of a paternalistic State in some countries has been that the State has taken charge of instilling values in children. In effect it has assumed the paternal and maternal responsibility of the parents of the child.

Another alternative to the fight against poverty is to change the criteria of justice, passing from what is an inverse distributive justice to an equitable justice. The social message of Jubilee 2000 went in this direction. The industrialized countries have turned into very bad administrators of the money of the poor; and 0.7% of the budget for public works ought to be set aside for underdeveloped countries as way of returning to them at least part of the money which we have robbed from them.

By evangelization we contribute to the building of a world based on equitable justice. Pope Paul VI writes: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new.' But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.



Strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 18-19). A simple example to illustrate the above statement, is mission sponsorship of a child. When one sponsors an Angolan child so that he might study is to promote the universal right to education. In such a way a child from Angola and a European child will enjoy going to school. This amounts to investing in the future of a nation, since both the Angolan and European child will contribute to the development and progress of his country.

For St. Vincent assistance can neither be nor appear to be a substitute for structural reform. On the contrary, injustice demands a cry to God for help. Even if from the side of human beings social-charitable work becomes a voluntary response, nevertheless from God's side it remains an obligation. Furthermore, Vincent de Paül underscores in a letter of March 8, 1658 written to a superior of Marseilles: "May God give to us the grace to endear our hearts to the poor (*les misérables*) and to believe that when we offer them succor we are acting out of justice and not mercy" (ES VII, 90)!

Officially, the Church delayed incorporating into its social doctrine, "social justice" and by way of a small detail: the Christian reading of "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" of 1948 is put forward by Pope John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in terris* of April 11, 1963 (cf. *Pacem in terris*, nos. 11-34).

When St. Vincent speaks of social justice, he refers to divine justice. He presents an argument from theodicy: It is God who makes us just and wants that we recover our dignity as children of God that we used to have from Creation. For this reason social action becomes a way by which a person who has been marginalized recovers the dignity and freedom of a child of God; we are among the intermediaries of divine justice that leads to an extension of the Kingdom of God among the poor (cf. ES I, 203; ES IV, 168; ES IX, 919). In this light we ought to re-read no. 28 of the encyclical *Pacem in terris*.

## 5. The detailed outline of the Church's activity (31)

Pope Benedict XVI acknowledges all those associations, lay as well as religious, that through the ages have followed Christ The Good Samaritan, having fulfilled the spirit of the Law, they have comforted the poor in their material and spiritual needs, "in the

same way that we extinguish a flame." He illustrates this in the following points:

- a) According to the proposed model found in the parable of The Good Samaritan, Christian charity is simply before all else, a response to the immediate needs in a particular situation: the hungry need to be fed, the naked clothed, the sick cared for so that they recover, and the prisoners visited, etc.
- b) Charitable activity ought to be free from partisanship and ideology. It is neither a means for transforming the world according to an ideology nor does it serve a strategic purpose. Rather it is the present and concrete actualization of love that man always needs.
- c) Besides, charity ought not to be a means for what today can be termed as proselytizing. Love is free; it is not practiced in order to obtain other objectives. But this does not mean that charitable activity, in a manner of speaking, put God and Christ aside. Action always involves the entire person. Often the deepest roots of poverty lie precisely in the absence of God. Those who exercise charity in the name of the Church will never try to impose upon others the faith of the Church. It is evident that love, in its purity and gratuity, is the best testimony of the God in whom we believe and who inspires us to love.

## 6. Those responsible for charitable activity in the Church (32-39)

The Pope takes up again the theme treated in nos. 20-25, recalling the four pillars of the Christian community from which flow the charitable action of the Church: Prayer needs to accompany my service (cf. ES IX, 374-375.381.1117; ES XI 285); the Eucharist prompts me to be *Ἀγάπη* for the poor and formation leads to this: The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. This purpose is achieved when, faithful to St. Vincent, the members individually and collectively: ... help the clergy and laity in their formation and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelizing of the poor (CC no. 1.3). Let us remember that for St. Vincent, charitable action was already untied to the announcement of the *kerygma* and Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom for the poor.

The Pope describes the profile of the Christian who is responsible for Social Ministry: **a person of faith**, that manifests itself in action (cf. Sant 2,14-18; XI, 393 f.), **a person of prayer**

(cf. ES XI, 778), **with a spirit of humility** (cf. RC II, 14; CC 7) and **who is nourished by the Sacraments: principally the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation** (cf. CC 45, 1-2).

## 7. Conclusion (40-42)

The Pope refers to Hebrews 13:7-8: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The pope mentions some of those who have preceded us in the faith and the service of the poor, and among these was St. Vincent de Paul. The Pope urges us to place ourselves in the hands of Mary: "Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love: Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son — the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God's call and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 42).

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(GREGORY SEMENIUK, C.M., translator)

# Saint Vincent and Saint Louise in the Encyclical Letter “Deus Caritas Est”

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## **Love, the essence of Christianity**

Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical is devoted to the essence of Christianity, love. According to St. John (1 Jn 4:8) it is the definition of God: *Deus Caritas Est*. In the prominent sections of the encyclical, the end of the first part and the general conclusion, there is a specific reference to the saints, that they are proof of that interplay which vibrates between love of God and love of the neighbour: “The saints... constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord and, conversely, this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others” (§ 18).

The mention of the saints is not just a passing reference. As a matter of fact the Pope clearly explains that the entire Christian teaching on the first commandment of love is concretised in lived witness: “But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be ‘devout’ and to perform my ‘religious duties,’ then my relationship with God will also grow arid” (§ 18).

Although the encyclical does not explicitly quote it, the mind is inexorably drawn towards chapter V of the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen gentium*, on “The universal call to holiness in the Church”: “It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of love” (§ 40). “The forms and tasks of life are many but holiness is one — that sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God’s Spirit” (§ 41).

We are all supposed to be holy. St. Paul had stressed that right from the start, writing to the first Christians and calling them “saints”; as baptised persons they were “consecrated” to God, and therefore holy. But by indicating their *being* he also stressed they *should be*. Jesus had said it: “You will be witnesses to me” (Acts 1:8).

## Saints who are Martyrs and Saints who are Confessors

Certain persons are referred to as "holy" in an exceptional way, men and women who distinguished themselves by the heroic level of their fidelity and their witnessing. From the very start the Church started using the word "saint" for these witnesses to the faith who knew how to remain faithful even to the shedding of their blood. "Martyr" comes from a Greek word for "witness," and was confined to those who had witnessed to their faith in Jesus to the point of dying for it. "There is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends" (Jn 15:13). But those Christians who give their lives day after day may also be considered martyrs, although without the shedding of their blood, because they also are witnesses. The early Christians gave these people the title of "confessors." In Latin this word corresponded to the Greek "martyrs" but by convention it came to mean that specific type of witnessing which was given, day by day right up to the moment of death, even though there was no shedding of their blood.

As has been said, down through the centuries the Church, in different ways depending on circumstances of time, has proposed certain more significant persons for the veneration of the faithful. Originally it was by the *vox populi* and the jurisdiction of the local bishops, later by a centralised procedure based in Rome, eventually codified in the famous *Caelestis Hierusalem* of Urban VIII in 1634.

Although this procedure, systematised by Cardinal Prospero Lambertini (later Benedict XIV) in 1734, was considerably simplified by Pope John Paul II in 1983 (*Divinus perfectionis magister*), it still remains a fact that only for certain persons does the Church authorise public veneration, and that only certain persons are put forward as exceptional models. The criterion is the reputation for holiness which these persons have and, therefore, the special request of the People of God.

But the list of witnesses to Faith and Charity is far longer than that. Independently of the catalogue of those who, by beatification and canonization, have been given official and liturgical veneration by the Church, the life and death of so many others provide all of us with splendid examples.

Article 37 of *Tertio millennio adveniente* tells us that in our century the martyrs have returned, especially the unknown ones, the "unknown soldiers of God's great cause. As far as possible their witness should not be lost to the Church." In his speech at the Fifth Extraordinary Consistory on 13 June 1994, Pope John Paul II hoped that on the occasion of the Jubilee a "contemporary martyrology" should be compiled, and a commission for "the new martyrs" was appointed to prepare this new contemporary martyrology, and "The

Day of Ecumenical Commemoration for the New Martyrs" was celebrated on 7 May 2000.

On 25 April 2005 Benedict XV also made this point in his homily, when he visited the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls: "The twentieth century was a period of martyrdom. Pope John Paul II stressed this, and he asked the Church to 'up-date the Martyrology,' and he beatified or canonised many martyrs of recent times. So, if the blood of martyrs is the seed of new Christians it is right that at the start of the third millennium we should expect a new flowering of the Church, especially in those places where it has most suffered for the faith and for witness to the Gospel."

In 1999 our own international periodical *Vincentiana* devoted a whole issue to "Martyrs of the Vincentian Family in the Twentieth Century."

### **Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac**

Agenzia Fides, part of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, published in its series *The Saints of Charity in the Encyclical "Deus Caritas Est,"* profiles of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, with an outline of their achievements, in the issues dated 07-04-2006 and 12-04 2006.

St. Vincent de Paul was beatified on 21 August 1729 and canonized on 16 June 1737. The process for St. Louise de Marillac started more than two centuries after her death, in 1886. She was beatified on 9 May 1920 and canonized on 11 March 1934. The time lapse is explained by the opposition, which always characterised the community of the Missioners and the Daughters of Charity, to what they thought of as a glorification contrary to humility.

A statement from the General Assembly of 1835 clearly explains this point of view; in Session VIII it explicitly rejected a proposal from the Roman confreres to support the process for the beatification of Fr Francesco Folchi, who had died with the reputation of holiness in 1823: *The proposal is unanimously rejected, both because it seems to go against the humility of our institute, and because the proofs on which the cause could be based seem to be of little weight.* The only exception made, then, was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for the Founder, St. Vincent de Paul.

An official attempt to break new ground with respect to this understanding of humility would seem to have been made by the Superior General Fr François Verdier in his circular letter of 1 January 1931. In 1843 the process for our martyrs in China, Perboyre and Clet, had been opened. And it was to be 1900 before the beginning of the processes for the other martyrs and confessors of the Vincentian Family.

Fr Verdier, referring back to the previous stand taken by the Assembly of 1835, said: "The motive for this prohibition was based on the humility which should be characteristic of the Little Company. With the passage of time outlooks change and today, while regarding humility as one of the virtues most necessary for our Congregation, we do not think that we are failing in it by working with the Roman tribunal on the causes of several confreres."

For anyone who knows anything of Church history the outstanding example of St. Vincent and St. Louise is obvious. They are two people who enormously influenced the development of the Church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and their contribution was decisive in enabling it to make an adequate response in the face of the renewal which was needed, in the essential fields of clergy formation, advancement of women, bringing lay persons to the fore, and the systematization of charity. Because of this, Popes have clearly given official recognition: Pope John XXIII declared St. Louise patron of all who work in social affairs (10-02-1960). Leo XIII, on 12 May 1885, proclaimed St. Vincent de Paul patron of all works of charity.

When visitors go into St. Peter's in Rome, the largest basilica in the world, they can see the statues of the two great saints of charity. Among the thirty-nine statues of founders in the central nave the statue of St. Vincent, by Pietro Bracci, following the canonization, was installed on the first level on the right hand side of the nave, after that of St. Teresa and before that of St. Philip Neri. The statue of St. Louise de Marillac, by Antonio Berti, was installed in 1954 at the transept of Saints Simon and Jude, above the niche of St. Peter Nolasco.

### The List of Saints given in the Encyclical

The criterion used by Pope Benedict XVI in drawing up the list of saints, which he has at the end of his encyclical, is quite clear; Pope John Paul II had, moreover, done the same thing in his postsynodal Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (25-03-1996), by mentioning St. Vincent de Paul in §§ 75 and 82.

At the end of *Deus Caritas Est* the Holy Father states that "the saints are the real light-bearers in the course of history, because they are men and women of faith, hope and love." In this list Mary, the mother of the Lord, excels all the rest as "the mirror of all holiness."

It is obvious that the Pope cannot mention all the saints; he mentions "just a few names." St. Martin is the first confessor; he was not a martyr, in spite of what the liturgy says: "His holy soul, though spared the sword of persecution, was not deprived of the martyr's palm" (Antiphon at the Magnificat). And in the medieval pious story his being a confessor is indicated by the incident of his giving half his



cloak to a poor man, something which the encyclical does not omit. Next come the pioneers of the monastic movement, St. Anthony the abbot, St. Francis of Assisi and the founders of the various religious orders of men and women, such as Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus de Lellis. It is in this context that we find Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Next come the saints of charity of the nineteenth century, Giuseppe Cottolengo and John Bosco. (It is interesting to recall that Giuseppe Cottolengo placed his well known work under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul). Next to be mentioned is Luigi Orione, beatified 26 October 1980, and lastly our own contemporary Teresa of Calcutta, beatified by Pope John Paul II on 19 October 2003. The last named had already been mentioned earlier in the encyclical in § 18, and it is clear that the point is being made that holiness is, and must be, a reality of our times and not just something in the past.

It is only natural that, in an encyclical deliberately focusing on charity as a central and essential aspect of Christianity, we see the saints of charity, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac listed as concrete examples of charity.

Speaking to the Daughters of Charity many times, in fact almost continually, St. Vincent referred to the definition of God, that He is love, anticipating, so to speak, by word and work, the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*.

"God is love... so it follows that being Daughters of Charity you are Daughters of God" (Conference of 28 July 1648).

"... to say Daughter of Charity is the same as saying Daughter of God" (Conference of 18 October 1655).

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)



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